

Heinemann's Colonial Library

When No
Man Pursueth

Q 1910

BY

MRS. BELLOC LOWNDIES

of 'THE HEART OF PENELOPE,' 'BARBARA REBELL,' etc.

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

Published for sale in the British Colonies and India only

*This Volume may also be had in Cloth Binding, price Three Shillings
and Sixpence.*

WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH

AN EVERYDAY STORY

BY

MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

BVCL 15154



823.89

L95W

“The wicked flee when no man pursueth”

Heinemann's Colonial Library of Popular Fiction

WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH

CHAPTER I

THEY stood in a group about the gate of a pretty, trim little garden now full of night fragrance; three men and one woman—a tall stout man, and a rather short, slender woman standing outside the gate, the other two men leaning over it.

They were saying eager last words, laughing cordially as men laugh who have been enjoying a pleasant hour with those of their own kind.

Each man was a doctor, a member of a profession; each woman was a doctor, a member of a profession. "She looks much like the most interesting profession," said the other.

"Reference to their families young," said the other reflecting that he had not been wholly, older, it seems, than she looks; she even so, a doctor's day that her brother, in spite of his interest in medicine just forty."

brother. "We thought him much older than that,"

The four had carelessly—after all, the question of these clear that they was of no moment to him.

one another. "It on Glyn, thoughtfully, "the brother and

The man certainly agreeable and intelligent people. As

up his clearest Louisa, Burdmore's wife, I'm afraid you ill-lipped sorry making her acquaintance; but of course the

For a few to hand her over to you soon, for she everyone waving my most important patient just now, is only are of that's the matter with Mrs. Burdmore

Her face was a singularly pure oval—her dark eyes of the same shade of brown as the plainly dressed hair round which was wound a rather bright blue scarf. The white gown she wore, made very simply, with apparently no heed to the passing fashion, was high to the throat and long to the wrists; to one of the two men standing inside the garden she recalled a beautiful and now rare colour-print, once shown him by a collector, of Emma, Lady Hamilton, painted in earliest youth, that is, in the days when Romney was first in love with her—and when his love perchance made him see her innocent.

Suddenly she spoke.

"Chris," she said gently, "Chris, dear, I'm afraid we ought to get home now, otherwise poor Louisa will be lonely—I told her we should not be more than ten minutes."

Her companion waited till the cigarette he was holding between his lips was well alight—then he let the foot upon it, and crunched it under his heel on the road on which they were walking—and his eyes, in the darkness, turned to the two men from whom he had just parted.

member—even
we're in Engla
'danger of a pra
!" he exclai
dly, "All ri
is two mi
: hear all
——"
two
are o
-pt be

Louisa was the kind of woman—what is far worse, the kind of patient—who never has her window open to the night air, even in the hottest weather. This, perhaps, was why the speaker, poor Louisa's husband, gave a short impatient sigh.

"Well, good-night, Glyn! I suppose we shall all meet somewhere to-morrow——" He turned to the other man, "You'll soon find out that Sunniland is a very sociable place, Mr. Whitby."

He had a low agreeable voice, and as he and his companion walked rather quickly away, those left behind, George Glyn, and his friend, Peter Whitby, remained silent for a moment, listening to the murmur of the voices, before they turned round and walked up the path to the house.

"Well, I shall be lucky in my nearest neighbours," said Peter Whitby, contentedly. "I like Burdmore. I've hardly ever met a better talker—and the sister's 'nice too.'" He added, after a pause, "She looks much younger than he does, doesn't she?"

"Yes, she does look young," said the other reflectively, "but she's older, it seems, than she looks; she told Mary the other day that her brother, in spite of his bald head, is only just forty."

"I should have thought him much older than that," Whitby spoke carelessly—after all, the question of these people's ages was of no moment to him.

"Yes," went on Glyn, thoughtfully, "the brother and sister are certainly agreeable and intelligent people. As for 'poor Louisa,' Burdmore's wife, I'm afraid you won't enjoy making her acquaintance; but of course the shall have to hand her over to you soon, for she's every-way of being my most important patient just now, is only

"What's the matter with Mrs. Burdmore?"

Whitby; the thought that he would be often obliged to call professionally at the hospitable house he had just left was pleasant. The two friends were now going up the steps leading to the verandah which was a feature of each of the pretty chalet-like houses which composed the oddly named hamlet of Sunniland.

Glyn did not answer at once. His hand was seeking the electric-light knob. "We needn't go in just yet;" then, as his eyes fell on the wicker table on which stood a tantalus and syphon, "Have something?" he asked, but Whitby shook his head.

Glyn turned up the light. He sat down, and a frown came over his plain, freckled face, a face on which were marked clearly conscientiousness and the power of concentration and industry, rather than that quick intellectual grasp which means so much to the modern medical man. He was not in evening dress, and had only joined the other at the Burdmores' house after the simple little dinner, to which he and Whitby had been asked, was over. Perhaps this was one reason why he seemed to present such a contrast to Peter Whitby,—that and the six years between their ages. The younger doctor was a fine-looking man; his clear-cut face, lit up by keen grey eyes, was crowned by a shock of fair curls which he kept, to the distress of an adoring mother, cut very short.

Whitby was still smoking an excellent cigar which had been given him by Burdmore, and as he threw away the stump over the rail of the verandah, he turned again, inquiringly, to George Glyn.

At last Glyn spoke: "The matter with Mrs. Burd-

I wish I could tell you! I wish I knew what matter with her. The case has worried me more

to confess to any one but you. Her sister-

in-law apparently thinks it's some form of hysteria, and yet—and yet I don't think it's that! I was called in to attend her the day after they had arrived at Sunniland; the journey had upset her——” and in a few brief words Glyn entered into certain technical details to which the other listened with a good deal of attention.

When Glyn stopped speaking, Whitby smiled.

“That looks as if the poor woman had had an old-fashioned attack of indigestion, but——”

To this suggestion, not very flattering to his professional acumen, Glyn made no answer; instead, he went straight on, as if he had not heard the other's interjection.

“She's taken a regular dislike to Lilywood. To the thinking of most people it's the prettiest house here, though, of course, it's not as pretty and cheerful as this place.”

He looked round him contentedly, his eyes resting with pleasure on the now rose-wreathed pillars supporting the verandah.

“Oh, come,” said the other, “I rather agree with Mrs. Burdmore. The first time you took me there I thought Lilywood a very gloomy-looking house. I don't like a place so surrounded with trees—so buried in a wood. To-night I liked it better, but of course the rest of the house has been sacrificed to that large central room. The owner made it a studio, didn't he?”

“Yes, and the furniture's valuable—it quite weighs on Miss Burdmore's mind. Why the whole place is crammed—even the bed rooms—with fine old pieces which the man to whom it belongs collected in Italy and Spain. Burdmore was very lucky to get it for the price he did, but of course such a house isn't everybody's bargain. The rent for it, just as it is, is only

forty pounds. You heard him say he'd taken it for a year?"

"Yes. Rather a foolish thing to do before he knew whether 'twould suit his wife."

"It's my impression that no place would suit her," said Glyn, thoughtfully, "and that poor Burdmore and his sister know that well enough. She's a silly, egoistical woman, wrapped up in herself. Sunniland, whatever people may say of it, is splendidly healthy, and for a few days there was a marked improvement in her state, but she's the type who delights in being ill. She really enjoys poor health," he laughed, not unkindly. "I can't help wondering what she was like when Burdmore married her."

"Married long?" asked Whitby casually.

"Yes—at least I suppose so. There's not a man living who would have married 'poor Louisa' if she'd been in anything like her present state—or—or looking as she looks now."

Whitby's rather boyish face assumed a faint look of disgust. He glanced inquiringly at his friend.

"As a woman," went on Glyn reluctantly, almost as if the words were being forced out of him, "as a woman she's—she's repulsive."

He waited a moment, rather ashamed of what he had said, and his thoughts took a swift flight. He was thinking of Mary Morgan, the pretty, charming girl to whom he was engaged, and to whom he was to be married in a few days.

After all, a man marries for better for worse, as well as for richer for poorer—but George Glyn told himself that even in deadly illness, in illness far worse than that from which Mrs. Burdmore was suffering, the soul conquers the body. Whatever Fate, what-

ever old age held in store for the woman he was going to make his wife, she would never look as Mrs. Burdmore looked, talk as Mrs. Burdmore talked.

"Burdmore's awfully good to her," he said aloud, "and she's really touchingly fond of him; it's the only nice thing about the poor woman. I hadn't been there three minutes before she said to me in a very marked way, '*Dr. Burdmore is my doctor as well as my husband, Mr. Glyn.*'"

"What's his qualification?" asked Whitby. "I rather wonder you didn't ask him to take over your work for the month you'll be away."

"Oh, I couldn't have done that," Glyn spoke rather quickly; "he doesn't seem to have practised at all since he was last in England, ever so many years ago, and then his qualification being what it is doesn't entitle him to be on our Medical Register. I assure you the people here—I mean in Sunniland—are very particular about these matters. Even in Florida he doesn't seem to have practised. As any one can tell by his talk, Burdmore's been something of a rolling stone."

"And have his wife and sister rolled along with him?" asked Whitby. Somehow these people, the brother and sister, interested him.

"I suppose so," said the other, carelessly. "Burdmore sometimes talks of the extraordinary life they led on their orange grove in Florida. I'm afraid they're not at all well off, for Miss Burdmore manages to do the whole work of Lilywood—you saw how well the supper was cooked and served to-night—with only the help of a very rough charwoman Mrs. Morgan was able to get for her!"

"Then who looks after Mrs. Burdmore?" asked Whitby; "she's quite laid up, isn't she?"

"Yes—she is for the moment; but still Miss Burdmore does it all. Looking after such a woman as her sister-in-law must be a great business, for the poor soul expects to be waited on hand and foot, and everything about her is beautifully dainty and clean."

"Miss Burdmore must be rather a remarkable woman," said Whitby thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed she is," said Glyn, "and between ourselves, Whitby, I like her far the best of the three. The man's good-natured, but he strikes me as a selfish fellow; as for his wife—well, you'll judge for yourself if I've exaggerated. But the extraordinary part of it is—though perhaps it isn't so very extraordinary after all——" he hesitated——

"Yes?" said Whitby.

"Well, oddly enough, Mrs. Burdmore can't bear her sister-in-law. She takes hardly any trouble to disguise her feeling, and I think Miss Burdmore feels it—keenly; the more so that 'Louisa' adores her husband, and is always pressing him to go out and enjoy himself. Of course you understand that I don't regard Mrs. Burdmore as a paying patient, Whitby."

"Yes, yes," said the other heartily, "of course I quite understand *that*."

At last the two men turned into the house, and went upstairs, but after he had said good-night to his host and friend, Peter Whitby still felt wide awake, and disinclined to go to bed.

He put out his candle, for the little room was filled with moonlight, and going over to the widely-open dormer window, he leant out and gazed with musing pleasure at the still, wooded landscape, now bathed in silver, spread out before him.

It was early July, and from the little garden below

there floated up sweet, pungent scents, while immediately beyond glinted the clean, sandy road, and, some two miles away, the lights of the little country town of Boxford, nestling at the foot of the great hill which forms a landmark to the whole of that side of Surrey.

Whitby's eyes, trying to trace the huge outline which he knew to be reared against the sky, began to distinguish more clearly in the moonlight, and he suddenly became aware of a dark oblong patch lying to the left, isolated from the surrounding fields. That must be—yes! of course it was—Lilywood, where he and Glyn had just spent the evening, but the trees which so closely surrounded the house completely hid the two-storeyed building. A curious fancy that—of building a house absolutely in the midst of a wood! But then everything about Lilywood was curious and unusual, even its temporary master.

With a half smile, the young man told himself that after all virtue was sometimes rewarded. He had thought to have a rather dull time at Sunniland acting as his friend's *locum tenens* during that friend's honeymoon. But not only were there these Burdmores, really pleasant and congenial people—but he had all been adopted in the kindest fashion by the household of the Morgans, so soon to be George Glyn's "in-laws." They were more commonplace than the Burdmores, of course, but nice people too, and with one of them all was already on the best of terms. This was Mrs. Morgan, the younger sister of Glyn's *fiancée*. If, to be sure, she was an amusing, original girl, rather young, but once, Whitby always enjoyed talking and sparring with her, and there had been a moment when he had thought of Jenny by far the most interesting person in Sunniland.

At last, turning away from the window, Whitby went

his profession, but it was not, and never would be, to him all that it was to his less brilliant friend. George Glyn was devoted to his work, conscientious, careful almost to excess, and keeping in touch, albeit in halting fashion, with all that was going on in the great world of discovery and science.

Very differently did young Whitby see life, and estimate the chances of his profession. He was in no hurry to take up private practice; he meant to see something of the world first, and he had come here, to spend these few weeks, at Sunniland, out of pure good nature, and to do his hard-worked friend a good turn.

Peter Whitby thought himself a philosopher, a man of the world. He had already made up his mind that he would not marry early, and that, though he would not marry for money, he would, if possible, go where money was.

Still, the young man was by no means as hard-hearted and unsentimental as he believed himself to be, and during the few days he had already been his friend's guest, preparatory to being that friend's best man and *locum tenens*, he had been more moved than he would have cared to confess by the sight of George Glyn's love for Mary Morgan, and the perfect confidence each felt in the other.

When Whitby at last came down and made his way into the little dining room, he at once saw that something had greatly disturbed his friend; the remains of a half-eaten breakfast had been pushed aside, and a look of perplexity and annoyance sat uneasily on Glyn's plain, freckled face. But, as the younger man came in, the host in Glyn showed itself.

"Just touch that bell, Peter," he said quickly, "and

Mrs. Bain will bring you in fresh coffee. I told her I thought you would be late," and then his hand moved rather nervously over two opened letters lying by his plate.

"Our marriage is put off," he announced gloomily, "for a fortnight, perhaps for three weeks."

"Anything wrong?" asked Whitby, concerned by the other's manner.

"No. But that makes it only the more irritating in a way! Mary's aunt, Mrs. Morgan's twin sister, after whom Mary is named, has taken it into her head to come home from America; but she hasn't even started yet. She won't be here for another fortnight, if then."

Glyn got up from the table, and began walking about the room.

"You know our wedding was originally to have been in August, in fact it would have been if you hadn't nobly come to the rescue! Well, the Morgans wrote and told this Mrs. James that Mary's marriage would be next month, and so of course she thinks she's coming in ample time. They've all written to me this morning, not only Mary, but also her father and mother, so of course I've had to give in. They think the twenty-ninth would be a good date."

He looked at his friend, and added slowly, "Mary and I are quite prepared to cut short our honeymoon. We can't expect you to extend the time you'd arranged to stay here."

"But of course I will!" exclaimed Whitby good-naturedly. He had never seen George Glyn so really put out—so utterly unlike his calm self. "I can stay quite well! Cheer up, old man, it'll only make a difference of a fortnight after all, and the Salamanders"—Whitby's irreverent nickname for the inhabitants

of Sunniland—"will have more time to get used to me."

"There's one bright spot," observed Glyn suddenly. "I shall be rather glad to watch Mrs. Burdmore's case a little longer, and to know what you think of it."

There followed a long pause, and both men were glad to hear a cheery voice hailing them from the verandah. It was Christopher Burdmore, looking, as he always did at whatever time of day his neighbours happened to see him, the embodiment of health and good-humour.

"I'm ashamed of coming so early!" he exclaimed, but I found that American book I told you of, and so I thought I'd bring it up at once, before I'd time to mislay it again. I thought if I came later you might both be out. I fear we shan't see much more of you, Glyn, till you're back from your honeymoon!"

"Oh yes, you will," George Glyn spoke very ruefully, "for our wedding's put off. An aunt of Mary's has suddenly announced her intention of being present. She's coming all the way from America on purpose to be there. Rather too bad, isn't it?"

"Too bad? I should think it is too bad!" exclaimed Burdmore, with more heat than the matter seemed to warrant. "I wouldn't have given in—unless of course it's a question of a legacy or a big cheque!"

Glyn shook his head, and looked at the speaker with a slight feeling of disgust; but after all, Burdmore meant no harm—he was a man who would always have his joke.

"Nothing of the sort," he said rather shortly, "but she's Mrs. Morgan's twin sister, and Mary's god-mother."

Burdmore, again with a more disturbed look than the occasion warranted, glanced inquiringly at Peter

Whitby, and in answer to that look the young man exclaimed quickly, "Oh, it makes no difference to me! I like Sunniland, I don't mind staying on at all."

"I'm glad it will make no difference to *your* plans," commented Burdmore with sudden heartiness. "By the way, I wonder if you will both be at The Haven this afternoon? Mrs. Morgan has asked my sister to tea. She doesn't like to leave Louisa, but I tell her I can be trusted to look after my own wife, eh, Glyn?"

"Yes," said Glyn smiling, "of course you can. I'll look in after lunch, and reassure Miss Burdmore. It will do her good to go out."

"That's all right, then! We'll expect you about three." Burdmore waved his hand, and, turning, ran down the steps and so to the gate.

Christopher Burdmore strode quickly along the short piece of road between George Glyn's gate and that of his own house, Lilywood. His face had become very thoughtful, and he pulled his long fair moustache meditatively—it was a way he had when disturbed. Had either of the two men whom he had just left suddenly seen him now—now that he was off his guard—they would have thought him curiously aged and altered in the last few moments.

When he reached his own garden gate he rattled it impatiently, and in answer to the signal Miss Burdmore opened the door of the house and unlocked the gate.

To the surprise of their neighbours the Burdmores always kept their garden gate locked. A tramp had got in one night; soon after their arrival in Sunniland; Miss Burdmore had found him asleep under the balcony which stretched verandah-wise right across the garden side of the house. She had been much startled and

alarmed, and since then,—it had only happened the second day of their arrival,—the front gate had been kept locked.

“Cynthia,” said Burdmore quickly, “I want to speak to you a moment. Let’s go round into the wood.”

She turned and gazed at him with a look of suspense and fear in her dark eyes, and he put his hand on her shoulder and smiled reassuringly.

They began walking down the path which led through the garden into the little wood which formed a belt round the lawn.

“Tell me at once, Chris,—don’t keep me waiting.” Cynthia Burdmore spoke in a low, even tone. Again she turned and faced her companion, and he read a painful anxiety and suspicion in her small sensitive face.

“Glyn’s wedding is put off,” he said briefly. “Rather rough luck, isn’t it?”

“Put off? For how long?” She still looked at him intently, as if trying to pierce his thought.

“A fortnight, from the date originally fixed perhaps three weeks. It rather upsets our plans, eh?”

And, as she still said nothing, he added more seriously, “Of course it won’t make any real difference, my dear, but still I feared it would upset you. It’s the fortune of war—it can’t be helped.”

Very gently she shook herself free from his detaining touch.

“Chris!” she said, in a low voice—her hands, small, delicate hands, were clasped together nervously—“I can’t bear it this time. I know you think I’m silly—and I daresay I *am* silly—but I’m so horribly frightened, Chris, so horribly frightened! We’re running such a risk. We’re in England now, not in Florida.”

"We're in Sunniland," he said shrewdly; "that is in as good an imitation of Florida as one could have a hope of finding in this country. Look here, Cynthia,"—his voice became at once commanding and caressing—"I know it's far worse for you than it is for me, but what can we do—now? Surely you wouldn't have us give up everything at the last moment? And what could we do—where should we go? We've put our hand to the plough——"

"Don't quote the Bible," she whispered, "it might bring us bad luck."

But Burdmore went on as if he had not heard her.

"And we can't now draw back. I don't think you realize how hard *my* part of the business is. I don't talk about it—why should I? But it's awfully difficult—you don't know how difficult it is—to make her sign even quite small cheques. Poor Louisa has disappointed me," he added reflectively, "disappointed me very much indeed; I thought she had a softer, kindlier nature."

"She hates me!" said Miss Burdmore in so low a tone that the other hardly caught the words. "Sometimes, when she stares at me with her light eyes, I feel afraid."

Burdmore looked at her curiously. He told himself, as many a wise man has had occasion to tell himself, that women are inexplicable beings. There was certainly no reason why Cynthia should feel afraid of Louisa.

"I'm sorry I ever took the job on," he exclaimed. "It was just an impulse! You weren't there you see—to pull me back. I suppose you would have pulled me back, Cynthia?"

"I'd have died rather than consent," she said. "You don't know what it's been to me, Chris—you're a man and you -you can't understand."

"Well, it won't last long, anyway,"—he spoke with a touch of awkward compunction.

"Is there no other way?" she whispered. "You're so clever, Chris—surely you might think of another way."

Her dark eyes and quivering mouth seemed to suggest far more than she found it possible to say.

"There would be another way out," said Burdmore. "I've thought of it more than once for—it hasn't been easy to manage Glyn lately."

He spoke in a deliberate, hesitating voice, and she, who could read his tortuous mind so well, looked at him with a new apprehension in her face.

"Tell me, Chris, I would rather know."

"I can't help feeling that Louisa's mania for jewels gives us a chance. You see, it's not as if she kept them away out of sight; there they are, spread out on the dressing table, over the bed, everywhere in fact! Why, only the other day your old woman picked up Louisa's most valuable ring and brought it to me. . . ."

"Well?" said Cynthia Burdmore, "Well, Chris? I don't see the point of all this." She spoke with a touch of sharp, weary fatigue in her voice.

"You will in a moment," he said quietly; then added, watching her as he spoke, "What more natural than that an attempt should be made on this house, Cynthia? Our nearest neighbour is Glyn, and he's a good way off. I've often felt uncomfortable, as it is, at having to leave you alone for the night—when business has called me to London."

Cynthia Burdmore was staring up into his eyes, a look of dawning comprehension on her face.

"In such a case," he went on, "a burglar's risk would be very small. Breaking into this house would

be child's play. If Louisa stayed perfectly still he could get off with the booty quite comfortably. If she stirred—if she made any fight—then, Cynthia, it's probable that in his own defence——” he did not finish his sentence, but there came over his lips a slight smile. “There would be ample time for the miscreant to get away, especially if he were willing to sacrifice whatever he had been able to take with him. He could cut across country to Epsom and catch an early train back to town. There would not be much risk.

“How strange,” said Cynthia in a low voice, “that you never thought of this before, Chris.”

“It's not a pleasant thought,” he answered musingly, “for there would be a certain risk. But still, now that Glyn's wedding has been put off, it might be—I don't say it will be—a solution. It would be better for you—at least I think it would be better for you—Cynthia?” he looked at her questioningly. “There would be the police investigation to face. But my past would bear investigation, Cynthia——” something he saw in her face made him insist. “You don't realize what a pull it gives a man never to have come in contact with the police! As regards Scotland Yard we have an absolutely clean sheet; didn't that old brute Munstead try to find out something to my disadvantage? Why, I could call him as a witness to character!” his voice rose, triumphant.

“Hush,” she said. “Don't talk so loud, Chris—of course we will do whatever you think best. I don't really care—I mean for myself.”

He seemed touched and pleased. “Good little girl,” he said, “I will say that for you—you're the best comrade a man ever had!”

“Then I suppose, for the present, we're to go on as usual?”

The vehemence and passion of revolt had gone from her face and voice alike ; she looked her usual pretty, refined, rather pathetic, self once more.

"Yes, we must go on as usual. But, in any case, it won't be for very long," he added, consolingly. "I assure you our friend Glyn's none too pleased at having to put off his wedding."

"By the way, why is it put off?" she asked, indifferently. They had turned and were going back to the house.

"An aunt of Mary Morgan—a twin sister of Mrs. Morgan—is coming from America on purpose to be at the marriage."

"From America, Chris?"

Again fear, a look of haunting dread, came over her face.

"Now, Cynthia!" he exclaimed. "This won't do—you mustn't be so jumpy! You may be sure I've thought of every possible and impossible coincidence, and before the aunt arrives I'll make it my business to find out all about her, and where she comes from."

"And is Mr. Whitby going to stay on?" she asked.

"Yes. I was very glad to hear that; his leaving would have been a real misfortune for us."

"I like Peter Whitby," she said pensively. "I like his name, and his young confident manner, and his curly hair." They were now approaching the door of the house, and talking in their ordinary tones.

"That's a good thing, for I like him too," said Burdmore, cheerfully. "And—and, Cynthia—I'm rather anxious that he should like us—really like us, I mean. Why shouldn't he take over poor Louisa's case now?" He looked down interrogatively at the woman by his side.

"Before Mr. Glyn goes away? But wouldn't that look rather odd?" Once more her delicately pure, sensitive face became suffused with unease and fear.

"Surely," he said, "surely, Cynthia, you can trust me not to suggest anything foolish? Believe me, the sooner young Whitby sees Louisa the better it will be." He lowered his voice, "It's not been very easy to manage Glyn the last few days; he suggested a second opinion—from London. Fortunately Louisa objected strongly. Let Whitby see what he can do with her."

They were now standing before the house-door. Burdmore put out his large hand, and, putting two fingers under his companion's chin, forced her to look at him.

"Cheer up," he said—then quoting an American "wheeze" which had greatly taken his fancy—"Cheer up, my girl, the worst has yet to come!"

"Don't say that!" she cried, sharply, "I hate to hear you say it! I've never thought it the least bit funny!"

"Cynthia!" Chris Burdmore spoke so loudly that she started. "You're not looking well. I insist on your going to the Morgans to-day. You hear—*I insist*. It's Saturday; old Morgan will be at home. He doesn't like me. I want him to like you."

"Oh, Chris, please don't force me to go to see those people."

"I can have no nonsense about this," he said quickly. "Glyn is coming to see if Louisa is well enough for you to leave her; if yes—and of course it will be yes—he will take you up to The Haven himself. You hear, dear. I wish you to go."

He opened the door and stood aside—ever courteous in small matters—to let her pass through into the large hall which his landlord had arranged as a studio. Perhaps it was the coloured gleams slanting into the room through the large stained-glass window which made Cynthia Burdmore look so strangely pale.

CHAPTER III

WHAT a very odd, rather absurd place Sunniland was! As odd and absurd as its name. When Peter Whitby had told a man who was in the City that he was going there, the other had laughed and said, "Well, look out, for you'll find yourself among a fine collection of cranks and criminals!" And though that, of course, was quite ridiculous, even George Glyn had admitted that there was something in what the City cynic had said. Sunniland was a curious place, with a curious history.

Before the phrase "Garden City" was invented, a financier who was something of a genius, something of a poet, and something, alas! of a fraud, had imagined, aye, and actually created, what he hoped would prove a modern Garden of Eden, a latter-day paradise within easy reach of London.

He had acquired a beautiful wooded estate in the loveliest stretch of Surrey country, named it Sunniland, and then proceeded to "develop" it on highly original lines. No one purchaser of a plot of ground on the estate was allowed to buy more than the site of a single house and garden. All architectural plans had to be submitted and approved by himself, and every householder was compelled to have the telephone. This indeed was a necessity, for one of the greatest peculiarities of Sunniland was the entire absence of shops; no slaughterhouse, no general grocery, no fowl farm was

allowed to sully the pure air of what its creator proudly termed the sunniest spot in England.

Sunniland soon became peopled with strange folk, for the most part harmless individualists and lovers of the simple life; many of those who found their way there were vegetarians, to whom it was delightful to find a place within easy distance of Covent-garden, where neither eyes nor ears were offended by the sight of a butcher's shop.

But before Sunniland had existed any time — as time counts in the life of even the humblest community — there came a sad end to its founder. Another of his schemes, less original, and far more likely to lead to trouble than his creation of Sunniland, went wrong, and the garden city was found to be the most considerable, if not the most realizable, of his assets. Accordingly, the plots of land which he had kept in his own hands, and the pretty houses which he had always been ready to buy back from their temporary owners, were sold to the highest bidder, and Sunniland for a time became a kind of No Man's Land, where, occasionally, amazing bargains in the way of property could be picked up. The type of man who has no love for the ordered and normal life of his kind discovered Sunniland; to such the fact that if there were no publichouses there was, also no church, and, therefore, no clerical supervision, or clerical gossip, was agreeable. . . . It was significant that by the time George Glyn bought the one practice which existed there, the tradespeople of the prosperous neighbouring town of Boxford only dealt with the Sunnilanders on a strictly cash basis.

And yet it takes all sorts to make even the world of such a place as Sunniland. It was not necessary to be

either a crank or a criminal to realize the charm of the wooded hill, and the health-giving property of the air, and so there soon gathered there the makings of a respectable and commonplace community.

The largest house, that which had been built by the financier for himself and his family, and named by him The Haven, was now owned and inhabited by the Morgans. Mr. Morgan, a rich and well-established London solicitor, had been able to purchase the pretty house and beautiful garden at a very low price.

The place pleased him the better for its lack of municipal Dogberries, and he felt that his own position was sufficiently established to enable him to ignore completely the rather doubtful reputation Sunniland had acquired. He and his kindly, comfortable wife brought a breath of sweet, clean air into the strange place. And if the shrewd lawyer and Mrs. Morgan had been, perhaps, a little surprised when their charming, unsophisticated elder daughter, Mary, became engaged to George Glyn, still, there was nothing to say against the young doctor, except that he was not of the type of which your great consultant is made, and that his means did not allow him to buy a more lucrative practice.

Mrs. Morgan was very ready—some people thought curiously ready—to make acquaintance with new comers. But these critical folk might have told themselves that her husband had exceptional means of finding out what he wanted to know concerning any new neighbours, and if, now and then, Mrs. Morgan was too fond of her home, as she expressed it, to have time to call on some delightful couple who were making Sunniland their temporary dwelling-place, the omission was so tactfully accomplished that it was scarcely observed,

and the sort of people whom the Morgans did not care to know very seldom stayed long in the place.

It was in this little world—a world now pleasantly excited over the prospect of Mary Morgan's approaching wedding—that the Burdmores were by this time firmly established, although they had not been in Sunniland many weeks.

Christopher Burdmore was an agreeable addition to the society of the place. Unlike some of his new friends who preferred to live in the present rather than to talk about the past, he was ready, nay, eager, to tell all about his curious and interesting career—how he had studied medicine in France and Germany, practised for a bit in Malta, and then gone out, first to Australia, and then to America, coming home from time to time for a few months and then going out again. It was probably during one of these short sojourns in England that he had met and married the melancholy, egotistical woman of whom Sunniland heard a good deal but saw very little, though Burdmore was pathetically grateful to any lady who would take the trouble to pay his wife a short call in her sick room.

As for the sister, Cynthia Burdmore, it was impossible not to like her. She was Sunniland's ideal of womanliness, always looking charming, although it was only too clear that she had studied that Victorian classic "How to Dress like a Lady, by a Lady, on £5 a Year"; able to hold her own in any conversation, and yet by no means talkative; above all, extremely kind and attentive to her sickly, fretful sister-in-law, though it was feared that the latter was not as grateful to her as she ought to be.

Yet another fact certainly added to the interest and

sympathy with which Christopher Burdmore and his sister were regarded. They were evidently far from well off; they had no servant, only a woman who came in each morning to do the rough work. Miss Burdmore apparently did everything else; she did not care to go out, and though often asked to the various houses where her brother was already so much at home, she very seldom accepted even the most pressing invitation.

CHAPTER IV

It was early in the afternoon of the same day—that day which had seen settled the postponement of George Glyn's and Mary Morgan's wedding.

John Morgan, George Glyn's prospective father-in-law, was making his way, with leisurely steps, from the little railway station which was situated some ten minutes from his house, "The Haven."

As a rule Mr. Morgan only got home on Saturdays at four o'clock, but to-day he had given himself an extra hour, for now that he was growing old—as he was often fond of telling himself and his wife, but nobody else—he felt he was entitled to more rest and comfort than he had thought it right to take when he was still a young man. There had been a time, that is when he and Mrs. Morgan were first married—aye, and for long after—when he would never have thought of taking a weekly half-holiday, and when he had declaimed with bitter scorn against those who were even then beginning tentatively to do that which has become universal. But though he had now reached the age when men begin to shake their heads over the coming generation, he was no longer so critical of other men's ways.

To-day, as he approached the charming house which had been built by the creator of Sunniland at the summit of the wooded estate, and which he, John Morgan, had secured at such a low upset price, he felt in a particular sense satisfied, both with himself and

with all his little world. He was pleased that George Glyn had consented to postpone the marriage, and the lawyer told himself with a smile that he might have gone much further than Sunniland, indeed, to half a dozen places held far more highly in the world's esteem than was the pretty spot where he had set up his household gods, before he would have met a man so well suited to become his son-in-law, as was the young doctor.

John Morgan belonged to a race of solicitors which is perhaps passing away, but which, when it has wholly disappeared, will leave a very real void in the British legal world. He had a contempt which was practical rather than ethical for any kind of sharp practice. He believed with his mind as well as with his conscience that honesty is the best policy.

In his case the truth of the cynical old saying had been most certainly exemplified. In John Morgan every client felt he had a sure, if not a warm, friend, and his probity did not in any way interfere with his marvellous knowledge of those legal subtleties to which the modern lawyer has to look in these hard times for a living.

Such a man was bound to have the faults which almost invariably form a lining to such qualities as those he undoubtedly possessed. He was apt to think himself always right; and his own actions, whatever they might be, always won his own full measure of approval.

When he had bought The Haven, he had felt more doubt than was generally the case concerning any contemplated action on his part, and he had not received the eager acquiescence to which he was accustomed from his dutiful wife. But time had proved him right. Sunniland doubtless had more than its share of

rogues and vagabonds, but they had never touched in any way the home circle of The Haven. Indeed, just now, Sunniland was singularly free from undesirables, and Mr. Morgan could not help smiling a little to himself when he remembered how wholly satisfied his wife had now become with her elder daughter's choice. In fact, Mrs. Morgan, with her shrewd mother wit, was really better pleased with honest George Glyn than was Mr. Morgan himself.

So it was with a light heart that the lawyer came within sight of his own house. Passing the main entrance, he walked on to a gate which led into the garden where he believed he would find his wife and daughters waiting for him. Then, opening the wooden gate, he stopped for a moment in the shadow cast by the high hedge, and looked with a good deal of pleasure at the scene spread out before him . . .

If every country has the gardens it deserves, England has deserved well of Providence, for even a small English garden is generally instinct with the spirit of rest and peace. This sense of brooding calm and beauty was peculiarly characteristic at every season of the year of the garden of The Haven, and now, in the intense airless heat of an early July afternoon, the broad lawns appeared a cool oasis to the eyes of their owner, an oasis forming a charming background to all that John Morgan held dearest in the world.

Mrs. Morgan, a homely, comfortable figure in her thin grey and mauve dress, still comely to look upon, though she would have scorned any pretensions to youth,—was sitting on a little knoll under a group of fine elms. Below was the tennis lawn, on which, in spite of the heat, Jenny and Peter Whitby had evidently just finished a single. The girl's bright pink cotton

frock set off her dark, irregular prettiness to great advantage, and she and the young man were talking and laughing, or rather sparring, together, for Jenny was a young lady with very decided opinions of her own, strong likes and dislikes, and she and Whitby did not always agree.

Mary, the elder and more demure of the sisters, was sitting by her mother, looking rather disconsolate, for George Glyn had not come in to lunch as he had promised to do; some tiresome patient had doubtless kept him, and this was the more annoying because Mary was longing to have a talk with him concerning the change in their arrangements.

As Mr. Morgan emerged from the shadow, he was amused, perhaps a little saddened, to see how different were the expressions on his wife's and his elder daughter's faces. Mrs. Morgan smiled all over her kindly, good-natured countenance; she had not expected her husband to be home for another hour, and her heart welcomed him. But Mary looked disappointed, her fair face shadowed; she had for a moment thought it was George Glyn's footsteps which had crunched on the gravel—but she jumped up and kissed her father, perhaps a thought more warmly than usual.

Mr. Morgan sat down by his wife, while Mary went and joined her sister and Peter Whitby.

“Have you had a nice time at the office, dear?”

Mrs. Morgan, if alone with her husband on his return home, generally greeted her John with this question, for to her the office in Bedford-row was the battleground on which her especial hero offered combat, and, like most heroes, was generally victorious. Often John Morgan simply nodded his head, but sometimes he would make an answer which roused Mrs. Morgan to

gentle indignation, and caused her to feel that a lawyer's clients were a breed apart, a wicked, mean, sly breed of human beings, created by an inscrutable Providence to annoy and distract, but never to deceive, the great pundits of the law of whom her husband was one.

Mr. Morgan was what is significantly called a family lawyer; it was to him that people came with their troubles, their difficulties, their shames, above all, their demands for the impossible, the impossible being, in almost every case, money. The solicitor believed himself to be discretion itself, and so he was regarded by all his friends and clients, but Mrs. Morgan was ignorant of very little which went on in Bedford-row, and with her had been discussed in the last twenty-seven years, aye, and more, for the two had enjoyed a long old-fashioned engagement, many knotty points, if not of law, then certainly of conduct.

"Upon my word," her husband exclaimed, "I'm beginning to think, Jane, that the world's made up of swindlers! People talk of Sunniland being a queer place, but there are much queerer people outside Sunniland than there are in it! Take what happened to me this morning. A man comes to me—a man, mark you, who's no chicken—and says that about two months ago he met a pretty widow who someone told him was very well off—the widow, in fact, of a rich Manchester man. For fear anyone should get in front of him, he married her out of hand, and now, at the end of the honeymoon, he finds out she's nothing, and what's worse, that she's made the same miscalculation concerning himself! He came to ask me whether he could get out of his bargain on the plea that she married him under false pretences! 'You got my brother out of a worse scrape than that, Mr. Morgan.'

That's what the fellow had the impudence to say to me."

"What a good thing," said his wife, comfortably, "that our Mary is marrying such an honest man."

Mrs. Morgan always applied to every story told her the touchstone of her own immediate experience and surroundings, and though this sometimes irritated her husband, it made her a soothing, because an incurious, confidant.

"Yes," he said meditatively, "George is certainly a most honest fellow, but still I sometimes ask myself whether he doesn't belong to the race of under-dogs. It's all very well never to take in other people, but you must look out for yourself too, and in a place like this George will have to look out. As it is, his books showed more bad debts last year than I at all liked, and then, though I wouldn't have Mary marry a hard man, this young fellow's too soft! From what I can make out he's giving a great deal of thought and attention to the wife of that fellow Burdmore, and from something he said the other day I gather he's not going to charge the man anything for all this attendance. I can't see that the fact that Christopher Burdmore many years ago took some kind of a foreign degree entitles him and his family to free medical attendance. He doesn't practise, and I wouldn't trust him with a sick cat."

"I'm afraid, John, you don't like Mr. Burdmore?"

Mrs. Morgan became rather red. She would have been ashamed to confess how often the idle tenant of Lilywood had spent the best part of the afternoon at The Haven during the last few days; for her part she found Christopher Burdmore an amusing visitor, more amusing than the very young people her children

naturally brought about the house. With a slight sense of guilt she remembered that she had asked the brother and sister to come up this very afternoon. It was perhaps fortunate that they had not yet arrived. Mr. Morgan sometimes liked to be alone with his wife ; he was luckily unaware that his daughters regarded this as one of their kind but odd father's many peculiarities.

"I don't dislike Burdmore," he said mildly, "you're always jumping to such conclusions, my dear. What I said, Jane, was something very different—namely, that I didn't think George ought to attend Burdmore's wife for nothing. Of course, I can see the man's an idle fellow, and I've caught him out in one or two—well—tarradiddles ; but I daresay there's no great harm in him, and if he can afford to be idle in these days, well, I'm not the man to say him nay. From what Jenny tells me, the sister must be a very good sort of woman, and I think he might manage sometimes to let her go out a bit and enjoy herself."

"I—I've asked them both to come here this afternoon," said Mrs. Morgan. "I pressed Mr. Burdmore to bring his sister yesterday just because of what you say, John, but he came alone. Still, he promised that she should come to-day. The poor thing ought to have a little change and fresh air. I liked her very much the one Sunday I drove her to church at Boxford."

Even as Mrs. Morgan was speaking she heard the click of the garden gate, and to her relief it was not Christopher Burdmore, but George Glyn, who walked through into the sunlight with Cynthia Burdmore by his side.

The husband and wife both got up ; they heard their elder daughter give an exclamation of pleasure as she

walked over the lawn towards her lover and his companion. The three figures met, and then turning, advanced towards the spot where Mr. and Mrs. Morgan stood in the shade of the high elms.

As they did so Cynthia Burdmore moved a little apart from George Glyn and his *fiancée*, and the observant lawyer, looking at her attentively, was struck by the extreme grace of her figure, and by her curious dissemblance to her brother.

Miss Burdmore was dressed in some thin, grey, diaphanous stuff which fell in folds to her feet; with it she wore a mauve linen sunbonnet which framed her small white face.

There are women whose peculiar flower-like charm impresses the men with whom they are brought in contact far more than it does their own sex; and while her husband was telling himself that he had not seen for many a long day so attractive-looking a young woman as the one now coming towards him, Mrs. Morgan was pitying Miss Burdmore's look of fragility and comparing her, much to her disadvantage, with the more blooming Mary and Jenny.

But this only made Mrs. Morgan's kind heart go out the more to the stranger, and steadying herself for a moment on her husband's arm, she walked down the little slope and came forward to meet her visitor.

"Welcome to The Haven!" she exclaimed, with old-fashioned courtesy; "we seem to know your brother so well already, but I was beginning to despair of ever seeing you here!"

Colour, a delicate, vivid rose-pink, came into Miss Burdmore's cheeks; she murmured a few words of gratitude redeemed from banality by the agreeable cadence of her voice; and, in spite of an effort made by

the four young people to draw her into their circle, she soon indicated that she would prefer to remain with her host and hostess.

Quietly and unobtrusively she devoted herself to amusing and interesting her host, and very soon she had won his close attention. Mrs. Morgan was well pleased that it should be so, the more that she was able to join in the conversation, for the subject to which the talk finally drifted was one which is of a perennial interest to every woman, young or old, married or single—namely, that of marriage, and the English marriage laws.

Without in any way transgressing Mrs. Morgan's rather strict ideal of feminine delicacy, Miss Burdmore showed herself surprisingly well acquainted with the laws covering the relations of men and women, not only at home, but abroad. She had lived, she explained, in the Colonies, as well as in America, and some of her quaint, rather guarded comments amused the lawyer and also his wife.

"From what you tell me," said Mr. Morgan at last, "I gather that it must be even easier in America to commit bigamy than it is in England, and that, my dear young lady, is saying a great deal."

"Oh John," cried Mrs. Morgan, "what a horrible idea!"

"Horrible from your point of view, Jane; but by no means as horrible as it used to be from the point of view of the law. When I was a young man, bigamy was treated as a very serious offence; but now, as often as not, the man is simply bound over to come up for judgment when called upon!"

It was a peculiarity of Cynthia Burdmore's that she did not express opinions. Her desire seemed to be

more to hear those of others than to express her own, and that is a rare and precious asset to any human being who wishes to be popular. Still, it was clear that she herself held what her hostess would have described as quite sound, old-fashioned views, and she spoke with disapproval of the American facility of divorce, and of the laxity of Transatlantic marriage laws.

From the anomalies of the marriage law they drifted on to the more familiar subject of Sunniland, and Miss Burdmore gratified both her hearers by expressing her great liking of the place, and of the few people whom she had already met there.

"There's only one thing," she said in her soft, gentle voice, "which rather troubles me, Mr. Morgan. That is, that the houses are so far apart. When I'm alone at Lilywood, with no one in the house but my sister-in-law, I often think how easy it would be for some one to break in. I was saying so to my brother only this morning, and there's no policeman—or is there a policeman?—in Sunniland."

"No," said the lawyer, smiling, "we've always managed to do without a policeman at Sunniland. But you must remember that a telephone message from here to the Boxford police-station would bring ample help in a very few minutes. They've not yet started a motor, but of course every country policeman can cycle."

"And has there never been a burglary in Sunniland?" asked Miss Burdmore, timorously.

"There's never been anything of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan. "Why should there be? You see, we've no publichouses, and tramps avoid the place in consequence. I'm sure that there's not a safer village in England. We've now lived here close on ten years,

and it's never once been necessary to send for the police."

"There have been some queer characters here lately," said Mr. Morgan, reflectively. "They've done a good deal of damage to some of the glass houses in the place—stolen the fruit, and so on."

"Nonsense!" said his wife. She did not take the indifferent reputation which still clung to Sunniland quite as philosophically as did her husband and her children; Mrs. Morgan had become warmly attached to the place, and she always defended its character through thick and thin.

"You see," said Miss Burdmore, hesitatingly, "my sister-in-law is so strangely fond of jewels, and has such a large collection of them."

Mrs. Morgan nodded and laughed. "I know," she said; "Jenny has told me about them. Your sister-in-law even wears them in bed, doesn't she?"

"Yes; and though many of the things are not worth much, she has a few very valuable jewels. I'm always afraid that our charwoman—Mrs. Muxlow, I mean—may talk about them, and make people believe that they are worth a great deal more than they are."

The shrewd lawyer smiled, a rather superior smile.

"You needn't be at all afraid," he said, "that the professional burglar dreams of putting himself out for anything but what he knows to be a good haul. In these days every little country pawnbroker is on the look out for stolen goods—but still, if it would be any comfort to you, I will say a word to the Boxford police——"

"Oh no, please don't!" she exclaimed. "I'm sure it would annoy Chris; he would think I was making a fuss about nothing!"

She bent her head, and neither of her listeners could

see the rather troubled frown which had come over her face. When she looked up again, she was once more her gentle, unruffled self.

"I think the sight of a policeman patrolling Sunniland would quite spoil the look of the place," she said smiling.

Then with a curious abruptness Miss Burdmore changed the conversation.

"I think," she said, turning to Mrs. Morgan, "that you know some people called Dunn, who live near Canterbury? In fact I have a message to you from them; they wish to be remembered to you."

"Of course we know them," said Mrs. Morgan heartily; "why my husband was articled to the father of the present Mr. Dunn! Are they old friends of yours, my dear?"

The speaker was beaming with pleasure. The mere fact that Cynthia Burdmore knew these people, with whose names she had been acquainted the greater part of her life, made Mrs. Morgan feel Miss Burdmore to be more commendable, more worthy of trust and confidence, than would have been some one lacking such credentials, and this feeling was increased rather than otherwise by the girl's simple answer, for "I was their governess," she said. "They were very kind to me, and I often hear from the children."

"How long were you there?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

But Cynthia did not seem to hear the question. Instead, she uttered a little exclamation of dismay: "Oh dear!" she cried, "I ought to be home by now. My sister-in-law always has a rather elaborate tea, and I promised my brother I would be back in good time to get it ready for her."

But Mrs. Morgan, with gentle insistence, made her

stay on a little longer, and the lawyer, who found himself curiously interested in, and attracted to, the sister of the man of whom he had so poor an opinion, told himself with some surprise that in spite of her decided manner, and in spite of her firm little chin, this woman had but little will of her own—she could be easily swayed this way and that.

Yet after all the delay was only a matter of a few minutes. Cynthia Burdmore remained to take a cup of Mrs. Morgan's tea, and to eat a piece of Mrs. Morgan's bread and butter; then she got up, and without even stopping to say good-bye to the two daughters of the house, began walking quickly to the gate.

Mr. Morgan accompanied her there, and then, while she was lingering a moment saying good-bye to her host, a curious little scene took place in another part of the garden. Peter Whitby suddenly declared that he too must go away, down to Glyn's house, the reason being that he had important letters to write before post-time.

"Why not write them here?" suggested Jenny, rather audaciously. The young girl still classed Cynthia Burdmore as among those women who have passed out of early youth and who therefore cannot be regarded in any sense as rivals, but still it irked her that Whitby should so evidently desire to leave The Haven now, at once, just when Cynthia was leaving.

"I only wish I could stay and write them here! But I've got to send my father on a note from a fellow. It really is important, or of course I'd stop here as long as Mrs. Morgan would let me." He smiled on Jenny, as if challenging any retort.

"In that case, you'd better walk down the hill with Miss Burdmore," suggested Mary placidly.

"Why shouldn't I come back as soon as I've written my letter?" said Whitby suddenly, "it won't be so hot then."

Mary nodded her head. "Yes, do that, Mr. Whitby," she said politely. She was scarcely aware of Whitby's existence, excepting in the character of the kind good-natured friend who had made it possible for them—her and George—to avoid the expense and trouble of an unknown *locum tenens* during their honeymoon.

Now he looked at her gratefully. "Yes," he said, "that's a good idea," and then he hurried off, almost running in his haste to reach the gate through which the slender grey-clad figure had just passed.

"Jane," said Mr. Morgan absently, "that's a very attractive young woman, eh?"

"But you wouldn't call her pretty, would you, John? Why, she's so pale!"

"'Pale and fair, pale and fair,'" he quoted an old song——

"No, no, John, she's dark, not fair."

But Mr. Morgan only smiled to himself. He knew what he meant quite well.

CHAPTER V

PETER WHITBY could not have told, had he been suddenly asked by one who had a right to demand a reason for so simple an occurrence, why he had desired so ardently to leave The Haven with Cynthia Burdmore.

When he had become aware that she was leaving and that he would have no chance of any talk with her, he had suddenly remembered a letter which he ought to send his father; true, it was not as urgent a matter as he had made it out to be, but still it had given him a sufficient reason for doing that which he had become set upon doing.

He felt as if he had a hundred things he wished to say to Miss Burdmore; and yet when he found himself by her side, walking down the pretty country road which led to the lower slopes of Sunniland, and so both to George Glyn's house, Rosedene, and to Lilywood, he fell into silence.

Cynthia Burdmore was essentially a listener, and not a talker; she had made a great effort that afternoon, and she felt tired and dispirited. The young man by her side would have felt surprised indeed had he known with what distaste she regarded his presence. She had hoped to be alone for a short time before answering the eager questions she foresaw would be put to her by Chris, but she knew she must allow nothing of this feeling to appear.

It is the Nemesis of human beings who are situated,

either by their own fault, or by that of someone else, as Cynthia Burdmore was now situated, never to be wholly themselves when others are by. Peter Whitby was already so far congenial to her that she did not feel it absolutely necessary to rouse herself in order to make conversation for his benefit. She had said truly that she liked him, and though she could well now have spared his company, his proximity, as they went on, became less unpleasing.

When they found themselves at the parting of the ways, a touch of real warmth came into her manner: "I'm afraid you must have thought me very dull, Mr. Whitby, but I feel tired—I had a bad night with my sister-in-law."

"I'm looking forward to seeing her," said Whitby, diffidently; "Glyn seems a little puzzled concerning her case. I'm not revealing any secret"—he smiled boyishly—"for Glyn tells me that he has already told you and your brother that he would like a second opinion."

"Yes! but Louisa—my sister-in-law, I mean—doesn't like the idea. I'm sure that she'll be delighted to see you, but I think we had better wait a day or two—I shall have to accustom her to the idea—she likes Dr. Glyn personally very much."

And as he was turning with her, she stopped him—"Don't come any further with me. I know you have a letter to write." There was something in her tone which compelled obedience.

As Miss Burdmore came within sight of Lilywood she saw that she was being waited for, and that eagerly. Chris Burdmore was leaning over the gate, smoking as usual a cigarette. He was a "chain" smoker; as soon

as one cigarette was done he lit another, but he always used an amber mouth-piece.

"Well!" he said, eagerly; "how did you get on? Did you make a good impression?"

"How can I tell?" she asked, wearily.

"Nonsense! Of course you can tell—trust a woman for that—with such a man as John Morgan."

Her eyes flashed into something like anger.

"I don't know what you mean, Chris. I know you always think the worst of people—but surely you don't take Mr. Morgan for—for a flirt?"

He laughed uproariously; "Ah! ah!" he cried, "I wish old Mother Morgan could hear you. Wouldn't it ruffle her feathers! To tell you the truth, I thought you would have brought young Whitby back with you, and I'm rather cross you didn't. Glyn was more fussy than ever to-day! I mean over poor Louisa——"

They were now in the house, in the large fantastic room which was their only sitting-room, and which still bore its old name of the studio. It was oppressively hot and airless, and with a tired gesture Cynthia took off her sun-bonnet, and unbuttoned her gloves.

"Has Louisa asked for me?" she said, without apparently noticing the remark concerning either Peter Whitby or George Glyn.

"No, indeed!" Chris Burdmore laughed again, heartily and infectiously, but there came no answering smile on his companion's face. "Louisa has had a very good time this afternoon! She's been showing me several gorgeous pieces of jewellery I'd not seen before, including a really rather charming Indian cross, which she bought from some poor woman who had drifted for a while into that awful boarding-house where Louisa

first had the felicity of meeting me. I've promised to get her something to add to her collection."

Cynthia Burdmore straightened herself. "You mean when you go to London?" she asked in a low tone.

"Yes, when I go to London—probably some day next week. By the way, did you do what I asked you to do—did you find out whether there's any kind of police patrol here?"

"Yes Chris—and there's nothing of the kind, nothing nearer than Boxford, but Mrs. Morgan reminded me that as each house here has a telephone, we are of course connected with the police station there, and that help could arrive in a very few minutes."

"Of course! Of course! But it's a great thing to know there's no stupid lout of a country constable lurking about."

Cynthia Burdmore opened her lips to speak again. For a moment she hesitated as to whether she should say she had rather exceeded her instructions—that she had simulated fear so successfully that Mr. Morgan had offered to speak on her behalf to the Boxford police. But she dreaded—she scarcely knew herself how much she dreaded—rousing the other's anger, or contempt, and so she remained silent.

A moment later came a distant cry. "Cynthia! Cynthia! I want you—why didn't you come up at once when you first came in?"

She moved quickly towards the staircase. "Why, Chris," she whispered, dismayed, "You must have left Louisa's door open, and she must have heard every word we said!"

"Well, what if she did?" he answered roughly, "we've not been talking secrets, have we? By the way, Glyn told me he had to be away most of to-morrow—"

“Yes?” Cynthia was standing on the second step of the carved staircase leading to the upper storey.

Burdmore got up, and coming close to her he said in a very low voice, “To-morrow would be a good opportunity for Whitby to make Louisa’s acquaintance—you understand?”

She nodded her head, and turning, ran upstairs.

CHAPTER VI

JENNY and Mary Morgan were both typical examples of English girlhood, and yet they presented a complete contrast the one to the other.

Mary was staid, thoughtful, her world bounded, as was her mother's, by those she loved and by their concerns. She could never have placed her affection where she could not wholly trust, and George Glyn, who to so many women would have appeared irritatingly commonplace and dully worthy, satisfied every need of a far from easily satisfied nature and ideal. The life which now lay before her, which would have seemed narrow and confined to so many modern girls, was what, from her point of view, life should be, and Mary Morgan, so soon to be Mary Glyn, had in her the making of one of those fine steadfast English women who bear sons to conquer the world, and daughters to replenish the earth.

Very different was the younger sister. Jenny also had been educated in an old-fashioned, quiet home way, but she was full of curiosity concerning the world which lay beyond her boundaries; she would have liked to live in London, to be in touch with all sorts and conditions of interesting people, perhaps even to do something, to have a profession of her own.

Peter Whitby attracted her because she felt that he belonged to that larger sphere of which she knew so little, and of which she longed to know more. Most of the young men who came to The Haven were a little

afraid of its master, but so far Whitby had shown none of that fear; nay, more, in any discussion he held his own with Mr. Morgan. This pleased Jenny. The young doctor had only been in Sunniland ten days, and already the girl regarded him as being in a sense her friend, almost her property, and he, on his side, liked her well. Jenny Morgan was different from the various types of London girl with which he was acquainted; there was something original about her—she was fresh, unsophisticated.

Indeed, the only thing he had against her was her youth; for Whitby was still young enough to prefer women older than himself. The elusive, wild-fruit flavour which belongs to the girl who remains something of a child while yet flowering into womanhood did not attract him. But even to a man as mature as was Whitby in his own estimation, “a girl’s a girl for a’ that!” and they had been close allies and good comrades since his arrival at Sunniland.

It was Jenny who was always ready to make friends with new comers; indeed, it was she—and, at the time, she had been rather proud of it—who had discovered the Burdmores, that is, in a social sense; though George Glyn, called in to attend Mrs. Burdmore, had of course first made acquaintance with the new inmates of Lilywood.

Oddly enough, it was Jenny who had at once become a favourite with the sick woman whose unseen presence seemed to brood over the strange, over-magnificently furnished room where Chris Burdmore and his sister received their visitors. It was Jenny who from the first spent many half-hours and hours in Mrs. Burdmore’s bedroom, listening to the invalid’s rather rambling talk, admiring with unfailing good nature the sick woman’s curious collection of showy jewellery, and satisfying the

poor soul's rather futile curiosity concerning Sunniland and its inhabitants.

Jenny Morgan had none of the morbid shrinking from the sick and ailing which is so usual nowadays. She was a fine, healthy young creature, full of kindly, generous instincts, and in this case she was touched—perhaps a little childishly flattered—by the preference Mrs. Burdmore showed for her society.

As to the other two inmates of Lilywood, Jenny liked Chris Burdmore because she thought him kind to his sick wife, and because of the latter's adoring affection for him; but Cynthia and she were not on such easy terms. Jenny was painfully impressed by Mrs. Burdmore's shrinking fear and dislike of her sister-in-law, and yet the girl had to admit that Miss Burdmore was unfailingly gentle in manner and attentive to the fractious invalid.

On this Saturday afternoon Jenny for a moment felt piqued at Peter Whitby's sudden defection. She was vaguely aware, as a woman is so often apt to be aware when a man she likes is concerned, that he had made the best of a rather poor excuse in order to hurry off with Cynthia Burdmore, and she was puzzled as well as piqued.

The temporary absence or withdrawal of a human being from a circle of men and women—what a difference it makes to what may be called the intimate chemistry of life! With the exception of George and Mary, the little group which soon gathered about Mrs. Morgan's tea-table all felt the poorer for the sudden disappearance of their two recent visitors.

Mr. Morgan, who had the average elderly man's dislike to new acquaintances and to strangers, had been

agreeably impressed by Miss Burdmore's personality. He had enjoyed his talk with so quietly intelligent a woman, one, too, whom he felt to be exceptionally attractive. Kindly Mrs. Morgan also felt sorry that Cynthia had left so soon; she regretted that she had had no opportunity of asking Miss Burdmore certain questions concerning the Dunns of Canterbury, the people, that is, to whom her new young friend had been governess, and to whose firm Mr. Morgan had been articulated in the long ago.

"I must go and see Mrs. Burdmore," she said meditatively. "But you have already explained to her, Jenny, how very little I go out, haven't you, dear? You have given her my messages, I hope?"

Jenny nodded and George Glyn turned with a grateful look to his prospective mother-in-law.

"You've given her more than messages," he said. "Why, only to-day I found her eating some of the jelly you sent her this morning, Mrs. Morgan. If she goes on as she is doing now, I don't see why she shouldn't come downstairs very soon."

"I'm so glad Mrs. Burdmore is better, George." Mary spoke in what was for her a very eager tone; she knew how this not very important case had troubled and puzzled her betrothed, and everything that touched him nearly was of moment to her.

"Yes," he said, "I'm very glad in one way, but still, I would far rather Whitby had first seen Mrs. Burdmore in one of her attacks of illness than on the mend, as she is now."

"Oh, George," said Mrs. Morgan, smiling, "that certainly does not sound quite kind. does it?"

"I can't get out of her the name of the doctor who seems to have attended her at Southampton." Glyn

was talking in a slow, ruminative way, as if more to himself than to those around him.

"Why not ask Burdmore or his sister?" said the solicitor drily. Glyn's slowness always irritated him.

"I have done that," said the other, reluctantly. "Of course I've asked them all three; but the extraordinary thing is they all declare they can't remember the man's name! Burdmore said that if I had a directory of Southampton he thought he could spot it at once; he says it was an ordinary name, such as Williamson, or Davidson, or Robertson."

"They probably had some kind of quarrel with the man," said the lawyer, "and so they don't want you to be brought into contact with him."

"But I hope you don't mean to suggest, sir, that such a fact would make them tell me a downright untruth."

Glyn looked gravely at Mr. Morgan. He admired and esteemed Mary's father, but he was often startled to find the shrewd solicitor betraying how very low was his general estimate of human nature.

Both Jenny and her mother saw that Mr. Morgan was slightly annoyed, taken aback as it were, by the younger man's question.

"Oh, dear!" said the older lady to herself, "I do wish dear George wouldn't argue so with John. I hope he won't go on doing it after dear Mary and he are married,"—which shows that Mrs. Morgan had a touching belief in the transforming effect of matrimony.

It was Jenny who rushed to the rescue.

"What do you think of Cynthia Burdmore, papa?" she asked gaily. "I noticed that she seemed to devote herself specially to you."

But before he could answer, Mrs. Morgan had inter-

posed: "How your tongue does run on, child!" she said good-humouredly; "Miss Burdmore talked to me quite as much as she did to your father, and she told me a thing which interested me very much. She was governess for quite a long time to the Dunns of Canterbury!"

"I don't think she mentioned how long she was with them," said Mr. Morgan mildly. "As to whether I liked her, Jenny, I have not had much time to make up my mind. But one thing I can tell you; that is that she's a very sensible, thoughtful young woman, very different in every way from her feckless brother, and I should not be at all surprised to learn that she spends a good deal of her time getting him out of scrapes!"

"Whatever makes you think that, John?"

Mrs. Morgan looked at her husband with some curiosity. She had a great belief, born from long experience, in his extraordinary instinct where such matters were concerned.

The younger people were now moving out of earshot.

"Why do I think so?" he replied. "Boasters and loose-mouthed fellows like Burdmore are always going off the track; but I've noticed that Providence generally places at such a man's elbow a woman—mother, sister, or wife, it's very often a sister—whose business it seems to be to drag him back again on to the straight line. I take it from something Burdmore said the other day that his wife has an income on which they all three live. I remember the first time he saw me he went out of his way to tell me that Mrs. Burdmore had only a life interest in her property, so no wonder he's anxious about her health. But even when he volunteered that statement, I couldn't make up my mind

whether the fellow was telling me the truth; I suspected he had some ulterior motive. However, I like the sister, and in one matter I think Burdmore is quite straight."

"In what matter?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

She was looking anxiously at her husband; his words had vaguely disturbed her. John Morgan did not often waste so many minutes' talk in discussing their neighbours.

"Can't you guess?" he asked, and there came a rather grim smile over his strong jaw.

"No, John. I don't at all know what you mean."

"I mean about women," he said shortly. "I shouldn't care to have him hanging about here so much if I didn't think that in that one matter he's unlike most men of his species."

Mrs. Morgan got rather red. She belonged to an old-world type of Englishwoman; that which considered certain subjects as not fit to be discussed even between husband and wife, and in the matter of the character of the men who came to the house she trusted her John's judgment implicitly.

CHAPTER VII

Two or three days had gone by, when, quite unexpectedly from his own point of view, Peter Whitby saw for the first time Mrs. Burdmore, the ailing woman in whose case his friend George Glyn took so great an interest.

Glyn was going to London for the day, and while the two friends were having breakfast the question of Christopher Burdmore's sick wife, and of when and how Whitby should see her, had cropped up. Glyn expressed the wish—a very natural one in the circumstances—that Whitby should not see the patient until he himself was able to be present.

“Oddly enough,” he said, musingly, “I can never manage to see Mrs. Burdmore alone—she's excessively, ridiculously prudish, as you'll find to your cost after I've gone! Her husband's generally there, and when he's not, then her sister-in-law hovers about the room. When you and I go there together, at any rate the first time, I think I shall make a formal request that we be left alone with her. I am really anxious to be there the first time you see her”—he spoke insistently, and Whitby felt surprised. This was the second time Glyn had said that within the last few minutes.

“I have no wish to see her till you think it's right for me to do so,” he said. “I've been at Lilywood most days, as you know, Glyn, but there's never been any question of my being taken up to see Mrs. Burd-

more. I know you think Burdmore's not satisfied with your treatment of the case. But you're wrong, I'm convinced of it."

Glyn went on speaking; he answered Whitby's first remark, "I know they haven't asked you to see her yet; but they may do so any moment—to-day for instance."

Glyn spoke quickly, rather irritably, and the other looked up astonished at the tone.

"But if such a thing should happen, I shall of course assume that she's still your patient, George"—he had caught the habit of calling his friend by his Christian name from the Morgans—"and refuse to see her."

"Well, I wish you would. You will oblige me greatly by doing that."

Then he folded up his napkin, for he was a man of precision, and hurried off to catch his train.

Oblige him greatly? What the devil had Glyn meant by that? Who was likely to wish to prejudice him—Peter Whitby—concerning the case of this poor lady? Perhaps Glyn was annoyed that the other had been at Lilywood so much of late, had become so much more intimate with this one family than with any other of the many who made up the little world of Sunniland. But Whitby, or so at least he assured himself after that curious little talk at breakfast, felt a certain delicacy in being always in and out of the Morgans' house. After all, Mrs. Morgan must dislike the perpetual presence of a stranger during these last days of her elder daughter's life at home.

And then—and then, though he would scarce acknowledge it to himself—Lilywood had become a far more attractive place to Peter Whitby than was The Haven.

Christopher Burdmore was the type of man who always impresses favourably men younger than himself. He had seen so much—heard so much. He was something of a cynic, and something of a philosopher, and he was an amusing talker; but much as young Whitby enjoyed his long discussions with Burdmore, a more real and sincere feeling of liking and respect attracted him to his new friend's sister. All unconsciously to himself, he saw in her his ideal of what a woman should be. She was intensely feminine, gentle in all her ways, yet capable and clever in all housewifely arts as few of the women he knew could claim to be.

At first Whitby had felt a certain delicacy in accepting Christopher Burdmore's frequent invitations, for he was, of course, aware that his constant presence at meals—especially supper—must entail a certain amount of real work on his hostess. But all such delicacy had soon been banished by his host.

“Cynthia,” said Chris Burdmore, laughing, “is a born cook; she delights in making savoury messes; I assure you she does! Even in the wilds we always had supper, and though people may say it's bad for the digestion, that's all nonsense!” And Whitby enjoyed the unconventional meals amazingly.

The Burdmores, to use a colloquial expression, “did themselves well,” curiously so considering their supposed lack of means; and one day Whitby, rather to his amusement, made a discovery which greatly relieved his mind concerning his hostess. Miss Burdmore laughingly disclaimed any share in the preparation of a certain delicious prawn aspic. It had come, she explained, with some other things from a well-known London caterer. As she gave him his second helping of the dainty, her voice dropped and she said:

“My sister-in-law, poor Louisa, is very fanciful about her food; we have constantly to get down calves’ foot jelly or something of the kind from London, and then we have a cold dish added.”

Though it was quite true that no suggestion that he should see the invalid had yet been made, in one sense the sick woman’s unseen presence always seemed to brood over the small party of three people downstairs. In the middle of a meal Miss Burdmore would suddenly get up and disappear upstairs, carrying a carefully arranged tray. Sometimes Whitby caught himself wondering why Burdmore did not relieve her of such duties; but about this there must have been some understanding between the brother and sister, for Chris never offered to help her.

And yet it would have been most unfair to regard Christopher Burdmore as neglectful of his wife. He often left Whitby and Cynthia alone together, and during those absences the young doctor would hear the murmur of two voices—the one peevish and querulous, the other kindly, hearty, and mirthful; but when Burdmore returned there would be on his face a grave, sad look, arousing Whitby’s uneasy sympathy and respect.

On one occasion, when they had all three been sitting taking their coffee—Cynthia Burdmore made delicious coffee—on the balcony which overlooked the sloping lawn and its thick belt of trees, there had fallen on the still air a cry of “Christopher! Christopher!” Burdmore had leapt to his feet and hurried indoors, and there had come the sound of a window above being thrown widely open.

Returning quickly, he had explained, “My wife wanted her window open—even she felt the need of air

to-night—and she thought that it would amuse her to hear us talking, you and I!”

As Miss Burdmore got up and went indoors, he had turned to Whitby, and in a much lower voice he had added the words,

“Unfortunately—most unfortunately—my wife does not like my sister! It is extraordinary that it should be so, for Cynthia is most kind to her in every way; but I think she is jealous of my sister’s health. Cynthia is wonderfully healthy, in spite of her delicate look. Of course, when my wife gets better, my sister will no longer live with us, but for the present Heaven only knows what I should do without her!”

“Yes, she does look well—Miss Burdmore, I mean.”

Whitby spoke heartily, with the admiration generally felt by a medical man for unflawed health. With a certain hesitation, he went on, “As to what you tell me, invalids often have a curious dislike for those who tend them. My father has found that a trouble in his practice; I mean the nursing question.” He added a little awkwardly, “Your sister looks a great deal younger than you do.”

“Yes,” said Burdmore absently, “she is younger, of course; let me see, is it six or seven years younger?—something of that kind. But I look older than I am, and she looks much younger than she is. My hair went when I was quite a young man, and then I have never been able to keep myself in condition. I hate games,” he said abruptly; “that is the one thing in which I am quite un-English.”

And then on this very day, quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly—by some odd little stroke of Fate, or so Peter Whitby believed—what Glyn had wished not to

happen, and what Whitby had promised him should not happen, did happen ! He saw, that is, his friend's patient—not alone, but in the presence of her sister-in-law ; and by a curious accident—one of those things no one could have foreseen—he ended by giving a very decided opinion on the case, one, however, which he was able to assure himself was quite unbiassed.

It fell about in this wise :

Generally speaking, Whitby was not a man to find time hang heavy on his hands, but the morning was intensely hot, and he found it difficult to settle down to anything. He was sitting out on the verandah reading a paper, when with a feeling of pleasure he saw Chris Burdmore's tall figure suddenly appear at the gate.

The young man got up quickly and walked down the steps into the garden.

"Come in, I'm so glad to see you," he called out. "Glyn's away for the day!"

"Is he?" A look of vexation came over Burdmore's broadly smiling face. "I rather hoped to catch him, as it's so early, for my wife doesn't feel quite so well to-day—only the heat, I fancy—and I promised I would bring him back with me. I wonder if you'd mind coming instead ? I know Glyn's most anxious you should make my wife's acquaintance. To tell you the truth," he lowered his voice a little and his face became grave, "our friend's a trifle over-conscientious. I've never known any man worry about his patients as Glyn worries. It's not my place to say what's the matter with poor Louisa, but I don't think you'll find the case at all complicated."

He waited a moment, but as Whitby made no answer, he went on,

"Of course, Glyn's a sound G.P. But I doubt if he's made any special study of the digestive organs."

"Well, no," said Whitby, smiling, "I don't suppose he has."

"I understand that it's your line, isn't it?"

"More or less," said the younger man; then he added, "I suppose something of the kind is really the matter with Mrs. Burdmore——"

"Well, of——but I mustn't bias you in any way."

"Glyn rather spoke as if he would like to be there when I first saw Mrs. Burdmore," said Whitby, irresolutely.

"Of course it would be better," Burdmore spoke meditatively, "better in one way, that is. But still I can't believe he would have the slightest objection to your coming in for a moment now—and as to my wife's state, well, to speak frankly, it would be a great comfort to have your unbiassed opinion. Glyn's manner rather frightens Louisa—that earnest, slow manner of his. You know she won't be left alone with him. I'm sure that after the first moment of recoil—you must be prepared for that, Whitby—you'll get on with her capitally."

As he spoke he was drawing his companion towards the gate. Together they passed out.

"Come up to Lilywood in any case," he said, persuasively. "Cynthia feels quite worried about Louisa, it will be a great comfort to her to see you."

"Is the doctor there? Why doesn't he come up? I want to see the doctor!"

Whitby had hardly had time to shake hands with Cynthia Burdmore, before there rang down through the house the sharp querulous cry.

Chris Burdmore had gone out on to the balcony, not quite out of earshot, but still perhaps too far to have heard the words which penetrated so clearly to Whitby and his companion.

There came a shadow over Miss Burdmore's pretty, pathetic face, and she said wearily,

"Perhaps, Mr. Whitby, you wouldn't mind going up and seeing my sister-in-law. She's really not been so well to-day, and I'm afraid she'll be very much disappointed if we have to go up and tell her Mr. Glyn has gone to London and that she can't see him before to-night."

Apparently taking his assent for granted, she rose.

"I will go up first, and then, if you don't mind, I'll ring when she's ready."

Whitby felt uncomfortable. There is no modern code of etiquette so rigid as that of the medical profession. Still, he told himself that it would be really ridiculous in this case to stand too closely to the letter of what Glyn had said. After all, what could it matter whether he saw the woman to-day or to-morrow, alone or in Glyn's company? Nay, it would be all to the advantage of Mrs. Burdmore, that he, Whitby, should have an opportunity of judging of her state.

The young man, medically speaking, had a very good opinion of himself; he was apt to come to a quick, clear decision when diagnosis was concerned, and as is natural to human beings, he remembered those cases where he had been proved to be triumphantly right, while he was apt to forget those where he had been at fault.

So it was that when there came a few moments later the sudden tingle of the bell, he went up the carved oak staircase two steps at a time, filled with a sense of eagerness and curiosity.

The first door opening out of the short wide passage to which the staircase gave access was ajar. He knocked tentatively.

"Come in," the voice was that of Miss Burdmore.

As he pushed the door open, the young doctor was struck by the mingled splendour and unsuitability of the furnishings of the bedroom in which he found himself.

The most prominent object was a Jacobean bed, draped in yellow brocade curtains which, from where Whitby stood, concealed the woman lying behind them. Opposite the bed stood a fine Italian marriage chest, embossed with the coat of arms of the Venetian bride whose wedding linen had once lain there. The very chairs, painted and inlaid with ivory, looked as if they were more fitted to be in a museum than in a country bedchamber.

The blinds were down, the bright summer sun shut out, and it took Whitby a moment or two to become accustomed to the dim grey light which filled the room.

Cynthia Burdmore was flitting about with noiseless steps, tidying there, straightening here, although the room already seemed exquisitely neat.

Whitby walked forward. With a touch of humour, he wondered if either the patient he was about to see, or, what was of more consequence to him, Cynthia Burdmore, would be able to tell by his manner that this was practically his first introduction to private practice.

CHAPTER VIII

AND then as Peter Whitby suddenly saw George Glyn's patient he received a shock—a shock which took the form of an unreasonable, and unreasoning, feeling of repugnance for the peculiar-looking human being whom he had up to that time thought of with half-pitying amusement as “poor Louisa,” the foolish, vain, but otherwise common-place wife of Christopher Burdmore.

Just as we in England have become accustomed to the conventional picture of John Bull as he appears in the pages of our comic papers, so on the Continent there is a conventional image of the typical Englishwoman, which, though a gross libel, is at once recognized by her foreign critics wherever it makes its appearance on the stage or in caricature. This imaginary type of British womanhood has a long and lanky figure, and immense hands and feet; her face is pallid, her eyes small and pale blue in tint, her mouth is filled with very long teeth, and her scanty hair is either red or pale brown.

Mrs. Burdmore sitting up in bed, her shrunken shoulders draped in bright pink silk, and wearing showy jewels, realized to a grotesque and almost terrifying extent the foreign caricaturist's idea of the average Englishwoman. Such at least was the thought which flashed through Peter Whitby's mind; fresh from his long sojourn in Vienna.

Then instinctive pity began to fight with the young

doctor's prejudice against his new patient, for she looked very ill.

In addition to the pink silk and lace wrap of which the bright hue formed an unpleasing, almost grotesque, contrast to her sallow skin and discoloured lips, Mrs. Burdmore wore an old-fashioned, heavy gold necklace studded with yellow topazes, and on her thin emaciated fingers were several fine rings.

Averting his eyes for a moment from the bed and its occupant, Whitby became aware that the dressing-table which filled up one of the windows was covered with shabby-looking jewel cases, some shut, some open. But his eyes did not linger there for more than a moment; they soon came back, as if the sight fascinated him, to the canopied bed and its strange inmate.

As he looked at her again, and it must be remembered that Peter Whitby had not been in the room more than a very few moments, the invalid's face assumed an expression of angry surprise at his presence.

"How dare you, Cynthia, bring a young man into my room! It would make Chris very angry—you know it would!"

"Oh, Louisa, I'm so very sorry! I ought to have told you! I ought to have prepared you! This is Mr. Whitby who is taking Mr. Glyn's practice."

On hearing her sister-in-law's explanation, the sick woman's face had resumed what Whitby, looking at her, felt pitifully sure was her usual look of peevish ill-temper.

"Well, I couldn't have told that, could I?" she said, ungraciously. "All the same, I beg your pardon, Dr. —what name?—oh, Whitby. Perhaps you'll forgive me for saying that you look very young to be a doctor already."

Mrs. Burdmore spoke in a low voice, and yet in her tone there was a good deal of concentrated energy.

"I suppose Dr. Glyn is very busy just now, though the wedding's not for another three weeks, is it? Rather hard on him it's being put off; but I suppose they've expectations from the American aunt, eh, doctor?"

Whitby looked at the speaker with contempt.

"What a terrible woman!" he exclaimed to himself. "How dreadful it must be for Miss Burdmore to be constantly with her!"

Still, he tried to smile, and to assume the pleasant bedside manner which, as he knew well, is so great an asset to a medical man. But he was not very successful in his effort, and to tell the truth he appeared awkward and shy.

Mrs. Burdmore looked at him with increasing and obvious disapproval.

"Well, perhaps you'll be able to do me good, which is more than Dr. Glyn has been able to do," she added, with the same ungracious manner.

The young man made no immediate answer, but he walked round the bed, and with a quick, quiet movement Cynthia Burdmore brought forward a chair.

Murmuring a word of thanks, he settled himself to listen attentively while his new patient detailed, with what seemed to him a certain horrid gusto, the symptoms of her illness.

As is so often the case with those who become weakened by any kind of prolonged suffering, Mrs. Burdmore kept repeating herself, making over and over again what sounded to her listener the drab recital of her ailments.

Peter Whitby listened with growing, but concealed,

impatience. He was not an unfeeling man ; indeed, he was always tender and patient with what he took to be real suffering, and in the various hospitals to which he had been attached he had been a great favourite with the patients. But he had very little sympathy with what to himself he called by the old-fashioned name of hypochondria ; and now, having lost the rather absurd self-consciousness which had afflicted him on first entering the room, he told himself with some irritation that there was nothing peculiar or mysterious about Mrs. Burdmore's case. Glyn was evidently over conscientious, over fussy ; he, Whitby, knew how this type of case ought to be treated. The woman was hysterically selfish, pampered by her kind husband—but whether he would be able to treat her as she ought to be treated was quite another matter ; it would probably require an older man, with more authority than he could pretend to have. . . .

His eyes began wandering from the sick woman's face ; with a slight shock of surprise he saw that Cynthia Burdmore had taken up her stand behind the yellow curtains on the further side of the bed, and that she was looking at him with a curious intensity of gaze, as if trying to fathom his thoughts.

There was a look of strain and of depression in her dark eyes ; and again Whitby felt a perhaps unreasonable feeling of anger against the sick woman whose illness he was persuaded was a good deal a matter of imagination, and whose monotonous utterances were, by now, scarcely reaching his brain.

At last Louisa Burdmore stopped speaking.

“ Well,” she said, “ I've told you everything I could about myself. I wonder if you'll be able to do me any more good than the last two doctors I've had.

That fellow at Southampton—d'you remember, Cynthia, how rude he was to Chris about my case?"

At this question Miss Burdmore flushed a deep red; she shrank back behind the curtain till Whitby could no longer see her.

He got up from his chair, and stood looking down into the pallid, discontented-looking face of his new patient.

"All you tell me," he said, in a good-humoured, cheerful voice, "simply proves, Mrs. Burdmore, that your digestion is very much out of order. If we can make that right—and it lies a great deal in your own hands—I've no doubt that you'll get quite well again; your symptoms are not as strange or unusual as you appear to think them!"

Then, as he saw a look of anger and disappointment come over the withered mouth and red-rimmed eyes, Whitby suddenly remembered with a rather comic dismay that it is an axiom with the medical profession not to allow a patient, especially a woman patient, to suppose that you treat her ailments lightly.

"But indigestion," he continued, with a judicial air which sat oddly on his bright young face, "is a very serious thing, a very serious thing indeed. It does not kill, but it may make the whole of life utterly miserable, Mrs. Burdmore."

As he spoke, Cynthia had moved forward and he saw a look of unmistakable relief come over her face.

"My sister-in-law suffers terribly sometimes," she murmured.

"How you do exaggerate, Cynthia!" exclaimed Mrs. Burdmore, pettishly. "I don't suffer terribly, as you call it, except—except just when I get those upsets—but I never feel really well."

She looked up, rather plaintively, at Whitby.

"The days go by and I seem to be getting on all right, and then quite suddenly I get one of those awful turns. But I've been feeling ever so much better the last two or three days. I almost fancied this morning that I could have got up and gone out for a walk!"

From behind the curtain, to the speaker's right, came the gently uttered words, "I don't think you'd have been wise to do that, dear," but Mrs. Burdmore paid no attention to the interruption, and even Whitby, although so completely subjugated by Cynthia Burdmore's charm and the delicate refinement to which the other's appearance formed so great a foil, felt surprised and discomfited. Why shouldn't the poor soul get up and go out if she felt herself equal to it?

He rose from his chair, and stood at the bottom of the bed, a manly, well-knit figure, his frank open face crowned with yellow curls which seemed to catch all the light in the darkened room. Even Mrs. Burdmore's sallow, pinched face brightened as she looked at him.

"I think I can make you better, Mrs. Burdmore," he said kindly, "and I've already thought of one simple thing that may possibly relieve you. Still, before actually writing you out a prescription, or even giving you any rule as to diet, I should like to know what my friend Glyn has to say about your case."

"Ask him soon," she said eagerly. "I daresay he would have taken more trouble if he hadn't been just going to be married. His mind is full of that—naturally." A smile quivered for a moment over her pale face. "I know when I was engaged to Chris, I never thought of anything but him."

Engaged to Chris! The thought that Christopher Burdmore, powerful, intelligent, it might almost be said

brilliant, was bound to this poor creature sent a thrill of horror through Peter Whitby. He was not particularly imaginative, but still, even to his mind, there was something awful in the sudden perception of all that may underlie the well-worn truism of marriage being a lottery. It was, he supposed, possible that Mrs. Burdmore, as quite a young woman, had possessed a fleeting prettiness, but think of what she was now! True, Christopher Burdmore looked a good deal over forty, but he was a man—a man full of strength and vigour tied to this poor atrophied creature, a woman atrophied in mind and character as well as in body.

It was with a feeling of keen relief that Whitby found himself once more downstairs, alone with Cynthia Burdmore.

For a moment they both remained silent, then, speaking as if with an effort, she said, "I see you don't take so serious a view of my sister-in-law's condition as Dr. Glyn seems to do? Or was it only that you thought it kinder to speak to her as you did?"

"If you wish my honest opinion," answered Whitby, getting rather red, "I consider Mrs. Burdmore what the French call a *malade imaginaire*. Mind you, I don't doubt that she feels very wretched and ill, and I do think from what she tells me that her digestion has got quite out of order. By the way, what does she eat? How do you feed her?"

"Well, that's the extraordinary thing," answered Miss Burdmore reluctantly, "Louisa has a very good appetite. I know," she smiled a little, "that you must have thought sometimes that we had rather indigestible supper dishes, but I assure you it's very much for Louisa's sake that I get them. She seems to like in-

digestible things—in fact she won't eat plain food if she can possibly help it."

"I'm not a bit surprised!" exclaimed Whitby. "I think any doctor would tell you that that's a definite symptom of what she's suffering from. She is ill, of course—and yet in one sense she's not ill! How long has she been like this?" he ended abruptly.

Cynthia Burdmore hesitated—hesitated long and painfully. "Some weeks," she said at last.

"Some weeks!" repeated Whitby, amazed, "surely longer than that?"

"Yes—yes—of course! I ought to have said some months; but—but at the time she fell ill, I was away; I was a governess."

Again she flushed, flushed a deep dusky red, as she had done during the young doctor's talk with Mrs. Burdmore.

"Mr. Whitby," she said impulsively, "I feel I can trust you! You see the truth is Louisa has a certain income of her own, and that makes it very difficult for me when I am dealing with her. I myself have nothing; and she feels, not unnaturally, that I'm living on her money, and that I ought to go out and again fend for myself. The fact that she has this income—it's only a life interest," she continued hurriedly, "makes us feel—I mean my brother and myself—that we ought to humour her in everything possible. Take the question of the food—if we live plainly she's angry and says I starve her, and yet I know the rich food she takes is bad for her!"

Whitby felt both touched by the confidence and angered at Mrs. Burdmore's cruel selfishness. Looking at his companion's troubled face, he told himself that it must have been a great effort to her to tell him of her

sister-in-law's vulgarity and meanness, and he admired the courage and the honesty with which she had spoken.

"My brother, of course, has a little money," Cynthia went on, "but he feels quite as much as I do that Louisa's income ought to be spent—especially in the state she now is—on Louisa herself."

Between his first professional visit to Mrs. Burdmore and the return of George Glyn from London, Whitby had some hours in which to regret that he had so entirely disregarded his friend's wish in this apparently unimportant matter of Chris Burdmore's wife.

In vain he assured himself that Glyn would understand, and would think what he had done quite natural under the circumstances; as it drew near to the time when he would have to confess what had happened, he became more and more uncomfortable. His conscience, acting tardily, told him that his colleague would have a right to be annoyed, and that seriously.

But to Whitby's relief, Glyn, coming back tired from his long hot day in town, took the news very quietly. Indeed, he did not seem as much surprised to hear that his wishes had been disregarded as Whitby had expected, and the young man felt a little piqued that it was so.

"You have something to confess?" repeated Glyn thoughtfully, in answer to a half-laughing remark made by the other. "Well, I think I can guess what it is. You have seen Mrs. Burdmore. I felt certain that Burdmore would try and get you up there, once I was safe out of the way; I've been aware for some time that he's not been satisfied with the way I've been treating the case."

"Oh, come," Whitby protested, "I don't think that's quite fair! She was asking for you, and Burdmore was awfully disappointed when he heard that you were in town."

"Yet he knew I was going," said Glyn, quickly. "But no matter—what I really want you to tell me, Whitby, is what you think of Mrs. Burdmore?"

The older doctor asked the question of the younger man very seriously. He was standing with his hat and stick still in his hand, just as he had come in from his long dusty hour in the train.

Whitby gave him a rather shamefaced look. It was nice of good old Glyn to have taken the news like that. But what was this he was saying?

"To tell you the truth, Peter, I'm not altogether sorry that you played me false. But now do tell me, here and now, what impression the poor woman made on you, and—and—if you don't mind my asking you—whether Burdmore himself made any suggestion as to what was ailing her."

"No, he did nothing of the kind," said Whitby, very decidedly. "In fact, when I came down from her room he'd gone out—and I've not seen him since."

"Was he present when you first saw her?" asked Glyn.

"No," said Whitby again.

He was puzzled by these references to Burdmore. He wondered what on earth Glyn meant to convey—if indeed he meant to convey anything. He went on,

"Miss Burdmore was there the whole time, but she said very little; indeed, I found Mrs. Burdmore only too ready to give me every kind of information."

And then, in a few words, but speaking with considerable eagerness, Whitby explained his theory as to what

seemed to him the reasons for the sick woman's physical and mental state, winding up with the words:—

“Of course, while allowing you have had far more experience than I've had, I can't see that there's any difficulty in diagnosing the case. I know what my father would advise; if they were better off he would have Mrs. Burdmore sent packing to a 'rest cure,' where she would be with people who didn't care a damn about her, and whose only object would be to make her forget herself and her fancied ailments!” The young man spoke with some heat, remembering the sick woman's ungracious, ungrateful manner to her kind, patient sister-in-law.

“You haven't seen her in one of her attacks,” objected Glyn quietly. “I don't think you'd think her ailments as imaginary as you seem to do if you'd seen her in the state she's been in two or three times. However, I shall be only too pleased if you will take her over. You may succeed where I failed. In any case”—Glyn got up and stood with his back to the window—“in any case, Whitby, I don't mind telling you that I'm very much relieved to hear your view of what ails the poor creature. It's puzzled me more than I care to confess, and—well, no matter! if you're right, then I've been wrong, absurdly wrong!”

Without waiting for an answer, he began walking towards the door, but when there, his hand already on the handle, he turned round.

“Then you will take over her case from to-day?”

“Yes—that is if you don't mind. I do think, honestly, that I shall be able to make her all right in a short time.”

“Perhaps you may,” said Glyn, slowly. “I hope to God you may!”

He went out, leaving Whitby staring after him.

What an extraordinary way of speaking about what was after all so very unimportant a matter. Poor old Glyn! If he took Mrs. Burdmore's condition so much to heart, what did he do when he had a really difficult and anxious case under consideration?

And it soon looked as if George Glyn had been wholly at fault and Peter Whitby absolutely right concerning Mrs. Burdmore. Perhaps owing to the fact that she was already on the mend when he saw her, or—as the young doctor himself naturally preferred to believe—through the administration by him of a new drug of which as yet comparatively little was known, the invalid grew steadily better.

With improving health, "Louisa's" manner to Whitby became quite different, almost gracious, and if he could not subdue his personal repugnance to the poor woman, or feel anything but contempt for her smallness of mind and absurd vanity, he was proud and pleased with his success.

As for Christopher Burdmore, he thanked Whitby with tears in his eyes—he was far more emotional than his sister—for the wonderful change in his wife's condition. "Why, my dear Whitby, we'll soon have her quite young and pretty again!" and though the doctor privately thought that were this to come to pass he would indeed have performed a miracle, he was much gratified by the perhaps exaggerated praise of his new patient's husband.

Only one thing annoyed him—Mrs. Burdmore refused to make any effort to throw off invalid ways, and her husband weakly indulged her in the matter. But then, after all, what did it matter? Her presence downstairs would have given no one but Chris any pleasure.

CHAPTER IX

AND so the quiet July days glided by—days which seemed to make so slight a mark on any of those concerned, and yet which will for ever linger in Peter Whitby's memory as having been irradiated with that peculiar radiance which is so rare as to count among Nature's miracles, though most men and women claim to have enjoyed it at least once in their lives.

His strong frame and well-balanced mind give every promise of a long life, but however long he lives Peter Whitby will never forget—indeed, there will ever remain poignantly present to him—not the more dramatic points of this, the most dramatic episode of an even, prosperous career, but that fragrant oasis, just those ten days when everything went well with him, when he felt happier than he had ever felt in his life, and when—as he now unsparingly recognizes—he was blind to all that he ought to have seen, and deaf to every sound which he would have heard so clearly had it been uttered in the ears of another.

At the time, the young man made no effort to analyse the cause of his own increasing content. Happy people seldom do. All he knew was that day by day his intimacy with the Burdmores—or perhaps it would be more honest to say with Cynthia Burdmore—became closer, and that there had arisen between them, between himself and the sweet-faced, gentle young woman, the strong link of an instinctive, unspoken friendship.

Perhaps only one person in Sunniland—shrewd, high-spirited Jenny Morgan, whose knowledge of life was still only a matter of instinct—noticed how many hours Whitby spent at Lilywood. As a matter of fact he was also a great deal at the Morgans, for he had become aware that Cynthia Burdmore preferred to have the mornings—he guessed them to be hard-working, tiring mornings—to herself, so he often spent the first part of the day in the hospitable house on the hill.

But, there how wearily time soon began to drag! Only Jenny again knew how oddly his attitude to her had altered since the first days of his stay with George Glyn; those careless, to her happy days during which he and she seemed to have so much in common, and when she had all unconsciously learnt to look for his coming with such eagerness and pleasure.

No wonder that Jenny, as time went on, watched Peter Whitby curiously, her young heart stirred to something like hurt anger and perplexity.

Now, each day, in any real sense, only began for Whitby after lunch, when he was rattling impatiently the front gate of Lilywood.

Once, in his impatience, he had vaulted over, and had rapped gaily at the front door of the villa; there had been a little delay, and then the door had been opened by Burdmore himself, and for the first time Whitby, with a shock of surprise, had realized that his good-natured friend had a temper, and an ugly one. There had been an angry scowl on Burdmore's face, but it had faded at once when he had seen who the visitor was, and he had explained it away with the words:—

“Your knock startled Cynthia! You know we have

always kept the front gate locked since that tramp came in and frightened her so."

But more often than not Burdmore was away from Lilywood during the long hours spent there by Whitby. He had become popular in the little neighbourhood, and he was fond of accepting invitations to tea; twice he ran up to London for the day.

Whitby always began by making a more or less long professional call on Mrs. Burdmore; this indeed was the excuse for his daily presence at Lilywood. But once the visit to Mrs. Burdmore was over, he was free to spend the rest of the time with Cynthia. And what happy times those were!

Never had he seen a woman who seemed less capable of what he understood by the word "flirtation." She was highly intelligent; able to talk of everything that interested him, and taking apparently a sincere and unaffected interest in his life, and in the career which he had sketched out. She spoke very little of herself, and he, with the egoism of youth, showed none of that curiosity as to her own past life which an older man would have done.

As the days slipped by, the young doctor's feeling grew a touch more close and jealous in nature. He saw with concern that Miss Burdmore's constant attendance on the sick woman was beginning to tell on her health; she was visibly nervous, suffering from strain. There came ringed shadows under her eyes. Once—only once—he thought her irritable, almost unkind, in her manner to the invalid; it was easy to see that the life she led was trying her beyond her strength.

Mrs. Burdmore did not become a pleasanter or more considerate patient as her health improved; the smallness of her nature, her amazing vanity, became more

apparent. To this vanity her husband freely pandered ; not so her sister-in-law. "I can't do it," Cynthia exclaimed one day, clasping her hands together with a passionate gesture, "and yet I know it's the only way to manage her!"

In one matter Whitby and Cynthia Burdmore differed, and this concerned, oddly enough, the treatment of the invalid. Whitby would have liked to see Mrs. Burdmore leave her room, come down and go out, and that though he was dimly aware of how completely it would destroy the charm of his visits to Lilywood.

But Miss Burdmore never wavered in her objection. "You don't know the effect excitement has on Louisa," she would say. "Do give her a little more time, Mr. Whitby—let her get really well upstairs."

And he—his own wish to be alone with the speaker playing traitor to his professional view of Mrs. Burdmore's case—assented.

"I wonder if you would mind coming to-day and seeing for yourself how Mrs. Burdmore is going on."

Peter Whitby was looking at his friend with eager eyes. He was very proud of this case—his first case in private practice!

Glyn looked at him gravely.

"Of course I'll come if you like, but—but I don't see much use in my doing so. You seem to be getting on all right." He added, with an effort, "Burdmore spoke very warmly of you to me yesterday ; he's apparently very grateful for the improvement in Mrs. Burdmore's condition."

"He's an awfully decent sort!" exclaimed the younger man. "Although it looks as if he were out a

great deal, he really spends hours with his wife. It's rather touching to see how fond they are of one another!"

"Have you any idea how long they've been married?" asked Glyn suddenly.

Even Whitby noticed that the other was speaking in an awkward, constrained voice; since he had handed over the case the older man had only once asked how Mrs. Burdmore was progressing. On the other hand, Whitby, especially the first two or three days, had constantly referred to her, especially in connection with the new drug which, as he had exclaimed laughingly, he was engaged in "trying on the dog," and which had soon showed itself so splendidly successful.

"How long they've been married?" he echoed, considerably surprised by the question, "I haven't the ghost of an idea. I should think a good long time. It's strange," he went on reflectively, "how a sickly woman sometimes holds a man. I remember my father once saying that to me. I wondered then if it were true—but I know it now."

"I don't think Miss Burdmore likes her sister-in-law." Glyn was ready to start on his morning round, his dog-cart was at the door, but he seemed in no hurry.

"How could she like her?" Whitby exclaimed quickly; "but whether she likes her or not she's extremely good to her."

Glyn still lingered. "If you really wish me to see Mrs. Burdmore, why shouldn't we go along now?" he asked.

"Certainly! I'm quite ready, but I thought you were in a hurry—that you had a long way to go to-day."

"I shan't have to stay more than a very few minutes at Lilywood."

The two men walked up the road while the horse was being led up and down, but they had to wait some few moments in front of the locked gate.

"It's absurd to keep this gate always locked," said Glyn irritably, "the Burdmores are the only people in Lilywood who have a lock in their gate, as far as I know. An inside bolt is good enough for me!"

But almost as he spoke Miss Burdmore was letting them in, and Glyn's touch of temper melted before her smile. She looked questioningly from one to the other.

"I've brought Mr. Glyn to see our patient," said Whitby, smiling. "I'm anxious that he should see how well she has got on during the last few days."

"Yes, she's wonderfully better," said Cynthia slowly; "but then, as we know only too well, she does get better between her attacks. That's the extraordinary thing about poor Louisa's case."

She turned as if seeking confirmation from George Glyn, and he bent his head gravely.

All three went upstairs into the invalid's room, and once there George Glyn did all that was expected of him by his friend. When he was actually in the presence of the sick woman, he showed himself genial, kind, and complimentary.

As a matter of fact, certain suspicions which had hung, like a terrible pall, over his mind and conscience, suddenly seemed absurd, preposterous.

George Glyn was not an imaginative man. He was accustomed to make certain deductions from facts presented to his notice, and he was scrupulously conscientious, but now he began asking himself whether after all he might not have made an extraordinary mistake.

Never had any man less desire to be proved right in his half-formed fears and theories than had this honest country doctor.

The sight of Mrs. Burdmore—cross, fretful, commonplace—increased his feeling of mingled relief and shame.

To Whitby's discomfort, his patient began at once complaining, and that bitterly. "I know you think I'm well again, Dr. Glyn," she said angrily, "but I'm nothing of the sort!"

"But you have been very much better during the last few days, Louisa," said Miss Burdmore, persuasively.

"That's all you know about it!" said the invalid crossly. "I've been having very strange sensations since I began taking that new medicine that Dr. Whitby got down from London for me. One day after taking it—I think it was the day before yesterday—the first time I stood on my feet, I felt quite giddy, quite as if I'd been poisoned!"

She laughed affectedly, and as she uttered the last word Glyn shot a quick glance—almost in spite of himself—at Cynthia Burdmore's face.

It seemed to him that there came a slight, involuntary tremor over the mouth, that most revealing feature of the face; but later, when he tried to remember exactly how Cynthia had looked—and again and again during that long day George Glyn reconstituted the little scene—he had to admit to himself that he was perhaps, even probably, mistaken. In fact, it was Peter Whitby, not Cynthia Burdmore, who had appeared angered and agitated on hearing poor Louisa's foolish remark.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Burdmore looked incomparably better than Glyn had ever seen her. Her sallow

skin had regained what the careful doctor's eye at once recognized as a natural, if not healthy, tint.

"Nonsense!" he said, firmly, "you are very much better, Mrs. Burdmore. I shouldn't have thought there could have come so great a change over any one in so few days. What you've got to do now is to try and throw off your invalid habits, and to go out and about."

He spoke with more decision than he was wont to do to women patients, and Whitby looked at him, amused and surprised.

Mrs. Burdmore shook her head angrily.

"I'm much more ill than you think," she said. "I've just told you how giddy I felt the only time I tried to walk about."

"Of course you did, everybody does the first time they get up after having been in bed." He added, "You can't be in better hands than in Mr. Whitby's."

Glyn took the limp ring-laden hand and pressed it; this informal visit to the woman who was so constantly in his mind struck him with a strange sense of unreality.

As he walked to the door, he looked round the room where he had pictured her lying, a helpless, if a vulgar and ill-tempered victim. . . .

But to-day she looked only too well able to take care of herself. Again he assured himself that he had been mistaken; with great relief he reminded himself that he had taken no one into his confidence.

The result of the otherwise unsatisfactory visit of the two doctors to Mrs. Burdmore was in one way very pleasant to Whitby. His senior congratulated him warmly and unreservedly on the improvement in the patient's condition.

"In spite of what she says, she looks another woman," he exclaimed heartily, "and what you've got to do now is to try and make her go out, and behave like a normal human being again, otherwise she will slip into regular invalid habits."

"She's already done that," said Whitby, ruefully. "It's the one thing over which Miss Burdmore and I disagree. I feel with you that she ought to be forced to dress properly and to get up and come downstairs, but both her husband and sister-in-law seem to think that to do anything of the kind, at any rate just now, would be cruel."

"You don't think they have any reason for wishing to keep her upstairs?" asked Glyn suddenly.

He turned and looked at his friend as he spoke, lowering his voice in order that his groom might not hear him.

Whitby's answer was unexpected.

"I'm not sure," he said. "I think that, half unconsciously to herself, Miss Burdmore may dread having her downstairs. I don't know if you realize, Glyn, that 'poor Louisa' is a very disagreeable woman?"

A slight unwilling smile came over Glyn's plain freckled face.

"I don't think you need tell me *that*, after the little scene we've just been through!" he answered, and then he got into his dog-cart and took the reins from his man.

As he drove away, the smile there had been on his face faded, and instead there came over it a curious frown, a look, if anything, of added perplexity. For a moment his head fell forward on his breast as was his habit when thinking deeply, and his horse stumbled on a stone.

He sat up and gathered up the reins. Come, this would never do! He determined—and more or less succeeded—to put Mrs. Burdmore, and the problem she presented to him, out of his mind. There was still a long time—worse luck—before his wedding day, and a great deal might happen between now and then.

CHAPTER X

It may be something of a truism to assert and insist on the strange fact, that two people can live in the same house side by side, linked by what appears a very great intimacy and mutual liking, and yet remain profoundly ignorant of what each is thinking, and even of what each is doing. And yet that this happens so often is one of the oddest problems of human life.

George Glyn and Peter Whitby were not only house-mates, but circumstances had thrown them into an exceptional, almost brotherly, intimacy, and yet neither knew, or even suspected, the one thing which was of vital importance to the other.

But for the dark suspicion which still sometimes haunted him, and which he kept so closely hidden in his own heart, life was very fair just now to George Glyn and seemed to spread itself happily and evenly before him. If Whitby were right in his diagnosis of Mrs. Burdmore's case—if it were really his treatment and not, as Glyn sometimes feared, the sudden cessation of whatever had caused her former illness, which was working a cure, then he could banish the Burdmores and their concerns from his mind.

But Glyn, though he saw with doubtful pleasure Whitby's constant visits to Lilywood, never suspected that the young man's attraction to Lilywood was not Burdmore, but Burdmore's sister. This was in a sense the more curious because he, George Glyn, had devoted,

and still devoted at odd times, a good deal of thought to Cynthia Burdmore. He had begun, as no man thrown with her could help doing, by liking her greatly. She had appeared to him to be, not only singularly unselfish, but transparently truthful, and then gradually he had been impelled to change his mind, and she had become to him sinister, secretive. He sometimes asked himself uneasily if Miss Burdmore was really kind to the sick woman who was so wholly in her power. Once he had seen Cynthia look at "poor Louisa" with what had seemed to the doctor a look of hatred and contempt.

As for Peter Whitby, it was perhaps less strange that he gave no thought to Glyn during those days of perfect contentment. Everything was going well with him. He had slipped into the position of comrade and helper, as well as friend to Cynthia Burdmore. Together they would spend the long afternoons, sometimes in the house, sometimes in the garden. And during the hours which slipped by so quickly, Burdmore, with a grin on his face which, as he knew well, disturbed and angered Cynthia, would either saunter out and pay a call, or disappear upstairs into his wife's room, there to amuse her with highly-spiced gossip concerning the other inhabitants of Sunniland.

"I don't want any one else when I can have Chris with me," the sick woman would say contentedly; and Peter Whitby, who did not find his liking for Cynthia's brother increase as time went on, had to admit that Chris Burdmore was a husband many a young and beautiful wife might have envied "poor Louisa."

It is always a dangerous sign when a man, finding pleasure in a woman's society, has come to the point when he is incapable of analysing the source of his

attraction. Whitby would have found it impossible to describe how he spent his time with Cynthia Burdmore, or why he liked being with her. Had he been asked if she were a good talker, he would have said "no," and he would have omitted to add that she was a remarkably good listener. He would even have denied her beauty, and this in all sincerity, for in his mind, aye, and in his eyes, she was constantly contrasted with Jenny Morgan, whose sparkling prettiness admitted of no denial, and with Mary, who was a pleasing type of stately, blooming young womanhood.

Small wonder that neither of the two men living side by side—meeting only at meals, and talking chiefly over professional matters—suspected what was hidden in the other's heart.

* * * * *

And then, on one of those halcyon days, there occurred a trifling incident which greatly disturbed Peter Whitby at the time, and which will always remain sharply stippled on the tablets of his emotional memory.

It took place on one of the few occasions on which he saw Jenny Morgan and Cynthia Burdmore together. True, Jenny sometimes came to Lilywood, but she was there as Mrs. Burdmore's visitor, and it would not have required a very acute observer to see that there had arisen a certain antagonism between the two younger women, and that although Jenny seldom referred to Cynthia, and Cynthia never to Jenny.

Had Whitby been asked, he would have sworn that Miss Burdmore was the tenderest being alive, and pretty Jenny callous, as the modern girl is apt to be, especially when anything connected with that most old-fashioned of the Christian virtues—pity—is in question.

But something suddenly occurred which forced him to admit, at any rate to himself; that both Jenny and Cynthia were in this one matter quite other than that he had thought them to be.

They were all three sitting together on the balcony, when there suddenly broke on the air the sharp, shrill cry of an animal in bitter pain. For some moments the insistent cries, which seemed to come from some distance away, rose lugubriously on the still, warm air, and then, simultaneously, both Whitby and Jenny Morgan rose to their feet.

"What can it be?" the girl asked, anxiously. "It doesn't sound like a dog's cry, does it?"

And then Miss Burdmore spoke: "I think it's a cat," she observed indifferently, "or perhaps a rabbit—something trapped." And she went on quietly with the needlework on which she was engaged.

But already Jenny was making for the glass door which led into the studio.

"Mr. Whitby, come and see what it is!" she said, a trifle imperiously; "if it's anything hurt we ought to go at once and see what can be done for it."

Followed by Peter Whitby, she went quickly out into the garden, and with some trouble they at last found in the field which lay beyond the boundaries of Lilywood a kitten in a trap with its paw broken. Whitby hesitated for a moment, but Jenny bravely took up the little creature and carried it into the house.

Then Whitby saw a curious thing—a look of annoyance, almost of disgust, sweep over Cynthia Burdmore's face.

"Oh, Miss Morgan," she exclaimed, "what a pity you brought it in! If Chris were at home he would have gone out and shot it. As it is"—she looked

dubiously at the ball of grey fluff crouching in Jenny's kind arms—"as it is," she repeated, slowly, "I suppose we had better drown it."

An angry flush came over little Jenny's face.

"No, indeed," she cried, "I shouldn't think of allowing it to be drowned! I'm sure you can cure the poor thing, Mr. Whitby; why, George put a dog's foot in splints last year, and it's perfectly well again, running about as happily as ever."

And then, at once, saying a very cold word of farewell to her hostess, Jenny Morgan had swept him off. Together they had taken the poor little creature down the road to Rosedene, and there ministered to its comfort, becoming more truly intimate and friendly during the process than they had ever been; and later Whitby had carried a basket containing the kitten up the hill to The Haven, staying on there, first to tea, and then to supper. Of Cynthia and her want of feeling Jenny Morgan said no word, but Whitby felt a little sting of pain, of wonder, that his liege lady had behaved so strangely.

Yet in the end this incident only served to draw Peter Whitby and Cynthia Burdmore the more closely together. The pain the matter gave him, his unwillingness to admit that she could fall in the least from his ideal of her, made him realize that night for the first time, all that this new friendship meant to him.

He went to Lilywood the next day far earlier than usual; and, within a few moments of the gate being unlocked, Miss Burdmore spoke of what had happened the day before.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that you thought me cruel yesterday—I mean over that poor kitten! The truth is I thought it had been far more hurt than it turned

out to have been, and I could not bear the thought of its being in agony a moment longer than was necessary. Of course, I see now that I was wrong, and Jenny Morgan right. Still, I don't think she need have thought me—as she so evidently did think me—a brute!”

As she said the words her voice had trembled, and tears had come into her eyes. Whitby, with an exultant feeling of relief, was more than satisfied. It was Cynthia's sensitive tenderness of heart which had made her act as she had done; and the little speech filled him with a kind of resentment against Jenny Morgan.

With a folly of which only a man who is deeply, unconsciously, in love is capable, Peter Whitby then and there made up his mind that he would speak to Jenny and point out to her how cruelly unkind her manner to Cynthia Burdmore had been.

How fortunate that he had promised to pay a professional visit to the injured kitten that very morning! That would give him the opportunity he sought. He went straight from Lilywood to The Haven, breasting the hill at a rapid pace, so eager was he to make the younger Miss Morgan understand the enormity of which she had been guilty. Why, her lack of charity, had actually brought tears into Cynthia's eyes!

Whitby had very soon dispensed with the formality of going round to the front entrance of the house where he had become so soon on such affectionate familiar terms, and as he opened the gate he saw Jenny standing close to it. Was it possible that she was there waiting for him? Her manner was singularly soft and kind, and he congratulated himself on the mood in which he found her. Surely it would be no difficult matter to make this pretty young creature see

that she ought to say a word to Miss Burdmore—her superior in age as well as in everything else—expressive of her regret at her rude abruptness the day before.

As Jenny led the way to the shed where she had made the kitten comfortable well out of sight and hearing of the other animals about the place, she began talking to the young man of the preparations which were now being actively pushed forward in view of Mary's wedding day.

"A great many of our friends are coming from London," she said, and then added, a little diffidently, "I wonder if your mother and sisters could come—or do you think it would bore them?"

"They will have gone abroad," he said smiling; "they always get away early. My three sisters all draw, and they wander about with mother over Northern France with sketch-books and knapsacks in quite an old-fashioned way."

"How I wish I could do that!" said Jenny, and she sighed.

Whitby looked at her with kindly eyes; he told himself how delightful a companion she would be on such an expedition, how indifferent to the trifling hardships of the road, how freshly interested in everything new and beautiful.

"Miss Jenny," he exclaimed, a little nervously, "I want to tell you something! I'm afraid our manner rather hurt Miss Burdmore yesterday afternoon. She spoke to me this morning about it. I fear she thought us rather unkind."

"Unkind? To her or to the kitten, Mr. Whitby? Surely it was not unkind to try and save the poor little thing from the horrible death she proposed for it?"

She turned on him with heightened colour.

"I once saw a kitten of that size being drowned, and I shall never forget it as long as I live! I was quite a little girl, and I remember how terribly angry mother was with the nurse who allowed me to see such a dreadful thing."

Whitby felt a thrill of anger shoot through him. How silly—how inconsequent women were, always arguing from the particular instance!

"But you don't understand," he said, sharply. "Miss Burdmore believed the poor little creature to be in agony, and if it had been as much hurt as she feared it was it would have been a merciful thing to put it out of its misery."

"Not by drowning," said Jenny, obstinately. "If it had been as badly hurt as you say she thought it was, we could have got it shot, or, better still, I could have gone in to Boxford and got a dose of poison."

"That really is unreasonable!" exclaimed Whitby, angrily. "I'm quite sure that Miss Burdmore suggested what she thought was a particularly humane way of destroying the poor little beast—and yet you treated her—you really did, Miss Jenny—as if she had been a murderess!"

"Well, I felt as if she were," Jenny laughed a little shamefacedly; "but you must admit, Mr. Whitby, that she didn't seem at all concerned when we heard those awful cries. She went on working quite quietly!"

"I'm afraid you must include me in your condemnation," he said very coldly, "for if you hadn't been there I don't suppose that I should have got up to see what was the matter. You don't seem to realize that Nature is cruel. People are fond of saying that Nature is kind, but that, Miss Jenny, is a terrible delusion."

He spoke earnestly, but his companion's thrust con-

cerning Cynthia Burdmore's singular indifference to the cries of pain had gone home, unwilling though he would have been to admit it. Deep in his heart he knew well enough, in spite of what he had just said, that, even had Jenny been far from Lilywood at the moment when those insistent cries had risen on the air, he would at once have gone and seen what he could do to save any living creature from the agony they expressed.

"If that is true," said Jenny, and he saw with concern that her eyes had suddenly filled with tears, "then, Mr. Whitby, I do condemn you! I should never have thought that you would have been so cruel, though I know that all doctors are cruel—their work makes them indifferent to pain."

"Oh, come!" said Whitby, vexed, amused, and a little hurt as well. "That's rather too bad! I'm sure George is the kindest soul alive, and though I don't pretend to be as tender-hearted as he is, I assure you that I'm not cruel."

She made no answer, and Whitby, instead of letting well alone, began again :

"Seriously, I wish you would say something to Miss Burdmore; she really was hurt; she says she thinks you thought her a—a brute."

Jenny gave him a quick glance. Then he and Cynthia had discussed her? Her young heart swelled with anger. Yet it was very quietly that she next spoke.

"No, I didn't think her a brute. I simply thought her"—she hesitated a moment, and then said deliberately—"callous and unfeeling. You see, I don't think Cynthia is really kind to Mrs. Burdmore."

"That's the most unjust thing I've ever heard said!"

exclaimed Whitby. He was now on firm ground, and sure of his facts. "Miss Burdmore is extraordinarily, amazingly, kind and patient to that disagreeable woman. I speak with knowledge there, Miss Jenny, for, as you know, I have now taken the case over from George."

Jenny made no answer, and Whitby, for a moment, left the delicate question of Cynthia's relations to her sister-in-law aside.

"I think you must admit that I have made Mrs. Burdmore better, eh?" he said eagerly.

"Yes, I think you have—but then she always does get better between her attacks of illness." She added ungraciously, "That's what George thinks so mysterious."

"I don't think she will ever have another attack," he said, cheerfully, "not if she does what she's told. Let me ask you one question, Miss Jenny—I know you will answer it truthfully; have you ever seen Miss Burdmore show the slightest unkindness to her sister-in-law?"

"No," answered Jenny, still speaking in the same constrained way, "but then you must remember I hardly ever see them together. Cynthia doesn't pretend to like her."

"How could she like her?" asked Whitby impatiently. "How could anyone really like Mrs. Burdmore!"

"I like her," said Jenny obstinately.

"*You!*" He could not help a touch of contempt creeping into his voice. "What do you know about her? You see Mrs. Burdmore at her best, amused by your——" he nearly said "chatter," but checked himself and substituted the word "conversation." "She doesn't regard you, still less treat you, as the white slave who, in exchange for her keep, is bound to

obey her slightest whim—to be always at her beck and call.”

“I’ve often wondered why Cynthia Burdmore gave up being a governess,” said Jenny, slowly.

“She probably gave up being a governess,” exclaimed Whitby, “because her brother very selfishly wanted to have the comfort of her presence! It’s clear that he found his wife impossible to manage alone, though mind you I admit he’s really fond of her. He ought to have got a proper nurse, of course, but Mrs. Burdmore has a horror of trained nurses. You can’t seriously think Cynthia”—the Christian name slipped out unaware—“really enjoys the life she’s leading?” He looked at the girl walking by his side with indignant severity.

“I don’t see why she shouldn’t,” said Jenny, shaking hands with him very coldly, for they were now once more close to the gate: “I don’t think I should mind it.”

CHAPTER XI

PETER WHITBY left The Haven dissatisfied with Jenny and dissatisfied with himself. The conversation they had just held with one another had made a painful impression on his mind, and, instead of going to Rose-dene, or back to Lilywood, he started off, with his thoughts for sole company, on a long solitary walk.

The young man, without being at all aware of it, had now come to the stage to which comes every man whose attraction to a woman is instinctive and not in any way reasoned—that is, he desired all those about him to admire and esteem that which exercised so powerful a fascination over himself.

Not for a moment would he have admitted to any one—least of all to himself—that he had fallen in love; but he wished to justify the feeling which made him desire to be constantly in Cynthia Burdmore's company. He had become anxious, perhaps unreasonably so, that Jenny Morgan should like, nay more, that she should become intimate with Cynthia. He told himself that the two were sufficiently of an age to be friends, great as was the difference between them, for Whitby, rather against the evidence of his senses, believed Cynthia to be over thirty.

During the few days in which his own intimacy with Miss Burdmore had made such strides, he had become aware how solitary, in a mental sense, was Cynthia's life. Of her devotion to her brother, of the closeness

of her tie to him, there could be no doubt; had she not given up a life that suited her, a home where she was appreciated, to come and nurse his wife?

And yet Whitby felt that the interests of the three were widely apart. He had been surprised to discover that Cynthia was a reader, further that she had a peculiar, rather a fastidious, taste—more that of a young man than a young woman where books were concerned. She had once expressed shyly, diffidently, to her new friend—for that at least Peter Whitby called himself—that what she sought in literature was forgetfulness of the material side of life. She was, particularly attracted by good verse, and of late Whitby had often read aloud to her while she stitched at the fine needlework for which he could not help suspecting she had a market.

How amazed, nay how piqued, would he have been had anyone told him, even a month ago, that the time was coming when he would find his greatest pleasure in reading poetry to a young woman while she sewed!

A month ago? Walking along on the shady side of the winding Surrey roads—for during this long walk Whitby left Sunniland far behind him—Whitby acknowledged to himself that even when living the life, at once busy and idle, which he had led that spring in his parents' house in Carlos Place, he had been thinking, far more than he now liked to remember, of Jenny Morgan.

It was Jenny, so he was well aware in his inmost heart, Jenny, and not the good-nature and generosity for which he had been given such lavish credit, both at home and in Sunniland, which had made him offer to take over George Glyn's practice during the young country doctor's honeymoon.

When the question had been first mooted, that is early in May, he had come down for a long week-end to Rosedene, and his fancy—a young man's roving, superficial fancy—had been strongly caught by Jenny Morgan.

Why, he had even tried to persuade his mother to ask her on a visit to town, and when it had been conveyed to him that this would not be "quite convenient" to the ladies of his family, he had told himself angrily that his sisters were evidently afraid of having something so fresh, young, and pretty as Jenny Morgan contrasted with themselves. Not that they were so much older, or to other eyes much less attractive than was little Jenny; but Peter had been, as brothers are so apt to be, unjust in his wrath.

How long ago those May days seemed now! How he had changed since then! Why his whole view of life had altered. When he had come to Sunniland, Whitby had fully decided that his future life should follow a determined path planned out by himself with the help of his shrewd worldly father.

In that imaginary human map the right kind of wife was an important feature, for even in these days it is to the material advantage of a doctor—even in the type of specialism Peter Whitby had chosen for himself—to be a married man. He had determined that his wife must be good-looking, sufficiently intelligent to be an agreeable companion, and of impeccable parentage and education. It would be well that she should have some fortune, with the chance of a substantial addition at her parents' death.

Without going so far as to put the matter into words, Whitby, on that first visit to Sunniland, had realized that Jenny Morgan fulfilled, to a rather exceptional

extent, all these conditions; and then how favourably she had compared with those of his sisters' friends whom he saw coming and going to his father's house! Only constant propinquity—or the exercise of a discretion very unusual in any family circle—makes possible a love affair between a very young man and a friend of his sisters.

Jenny Morgan, on the other hand, had been seen first by Whitby against what is, if her home is a happy one, a girl's best background. The two had "made friends" almost at once, and there had been no candid friend to criticise Jenny, no bystander ready with well-meant interference.

Peter Whitby had actually gone so far as to tell himself that it would be a pity not to see more of her. So he in his wisdom had argued with himself—in May.

Now, in July, he wondered that he could have been so foolish, so ignorant of his own nature, and of the demands that nature made upon him. Also, while he still liked, admired, and was interested in Jenny, he realized how much out he had been in his estimation of her nature and character. To know this he had but to go back to their recent conversation. Young as she was, unsophisticated as he believed her to be, the younger Miss Morgan was irritatingly self-opinionated. Nothing he had said concerning Cynthia Burdmore's un-failing kindness to her sister-in-law had had the slightest effect on Jenny; and how strange, how incomprehensible was her curious friendship for Mrs. Burdmore! She was certainly the only human being in Sunniland, with the exception of Mrs. Burdmore's own husband, who enjoyed being in the tiresome invalid's company.

To-day he asked himself, not for the first time, what such a girl as Jenny Morgan could find to talk about to

the grotesquely vain, narrow-minded, egoistical woman, whose interests in life seemed to be showy jewelry, her own ill-health, and the pettiest of small gossip, and who probably disliked her sister-in-law partly because Miss Burdmore would not minister to these tastes.

Proud though he was of the way in which he had cured her of what had seemed to those about her so mysterious a disease, Mrs. Burdmore had become a blot on Whitby's mental landscape. He disliked her to an extent which was almost ridiculous, and for which he blamed himself. When sitting with Cynthia in the large cool studio, or on the balcony which overlooked the round lawn and the belt of high trees which gave Lilywood its name, he found it impossible quite to forget his patient. Her unseen and alien presence brooded over Lilywood, and he was equally sure that Cynthia never for a moment became oblivious to the fact that upstairs lay a tyrant who had the right to compel her presence on the slightest pretext.

A foreigner, perhaps even an Irishman or a Scotchman, feeling as strongly as the young doctor did about the matter, might have br^{ought}ht himself to remonstrate with the husband, for s^{ure, for} it was Burdmore's place to keep his selfish wife iⁿ the s^{ize of}er; but Peter Whitby was a typical Englishman, ^{Whitby} he had to interfere in business other than his own. It ^{had} even occurred to him to speak to Chris Burdmore, ^{sufficient} but the delicate matter; but Burdmore's action, or ^{of} his lack of action, had now become a predomina^{nce}nce or in Whitby's feeling towards him, a feeling which ^{ice o} quickly changed from that of cordial liking and ^{pr}iration to rather contemptuous toleration.

But soon poor Cynthia w^{ould} have a holiday. A smile came over Peter Whitby's open face; for he had

formed a little plot—such a plot as doctors often form concerning their patients. If he were successful, then Jenny's friendship with Mrs. Burdmore would be abruptly suspended, for Whitby's scheme was none other than to manage that his tiresome patient should disappear for a time from Sunniland. In fact, he had already made all arrangements by which she should be taken, for a nominal fee, into one of the two nursing homes which were so profitable an adjunct to his father's practice in nervous diseases.

In his own mind, Peter Whitby had already settled that Mrs. Burdmore should leave Sunniland the day after George Glyn's wedding. He was ready to spare no trouble, no expense over the matter. If necessary, the woman whom they all laughingly called "Poor Louisa" should be motored to London. How delightful it would be to free Cynthia from the incubus which was gradually, or so he felt convinced, having so serious an effect on her health and spirits!

True, those most concerned, the patient herself and her husband, had not yet been consulted, or told of the pleasant surprise in store for them; but Whitby was confident that he would be able to persuade Mrs. Burdmore to do what he felt sure was best for herself. He knew how easily a determined, intelligent doctor can "manage" a fanciful patient.

The only person to whom the young doctor had spoken of his carefully thought-out plan had been George Glyn. Glyn had listened silently, and at the end all he had said was, "Have no doubt it would be an excellent thing for Mrs. Burdmore if you could persuade her husband and sister-in-law to allow her to leave Lilywood."

Whitby had had the impression that Glyn had been

about to add something, but instead of doing so the other had abruptly changed the subject.

The young man walked off a great deal of his irritation against Jenny. He was now sorry he had taken the trouble to go to The Haven ; he would have done far better to have stayed at Lilywood. After all, the girl's opinion of Cynthia was of very little moment, the more so that any day she might see reason to revise it. No doubt Mrs. Burdmore had told Jenny the kind of untruths and half-truths which form the staple conversation of hysterical and sickly women. . . .

BVCL 15154



823.89

L95W

CHAPTER XII

MR. MORGAN was moving about the large panelled room which was perhaps the most commodious and typical of the many lawyers' rooms in Bedford Row. Everything about it in the way of furniture was old, and what Mrs. Morgan would have called "good." An ancient speaking-tube was the most modern thing in the room, for the firm still held out successfully against the telephone. Over the fine white marble mantelpiece hung a portrait of John Morgan's uncle the founder of the firm.

At the present moment the solicitor was engaged in making preparations for his annual holiday. When the earlier date had been fixed for his daughter's marriage, he had arranged that his holiday should begin two days before the wedding, and it was characteristic of the man that he remained faithful to his own date after that of the marriage had been changed.

As he made sure that every paper, letter, and document was in order, exactly in the place where he would find it again in six weeks' time, and where, if such necessity arose, he could instruct his head clerk by letter to go and put his hand on it, Mr. Morgan allowed his mind to dwell on a call he had received that morning.

His visitor had been an old friend of his, a certain Robert Dunn; they had served their articles in the same office, in fact at Canterbury, in the office of the

other lawyer's father. In these days he did not often meet the one-time close friend who was now head of a noted provincial firm, but he was very glad to see him to-day, and their business once settled Mr. Morgan, slightly the elder of the two, had taken the opportunity of asking the other lawyer for some confidential particulars concerning the Burdmores, or rather Miss Burdmore, who, as he knew, had been governess to Robert Dunn's children.

As he now thought over the talk which had ensued—a very one-sided talk, for Robert Dunn, once started on the subject, had had a great deal to say concerning Miss Burdmore—an involuntary smile played round Mr. Morgan's firmly shut lips. He looked forward to telling his wife all that had been told him, the more so that it was in no way to the discredit of the young lady concerned! But the important point in his own mind was that it proved him, John Morgan, what he of course generally was, that is, right.

In Bedford Row no one ever disputed Mr. Morgan's verdict on anything, legal or other, but it was different at The Haven; there he had to bear with a certain amount of affectionate family contradiction.

In this matter of Miss Burdmore—her name he believed to be Cynthia, a pretty name—he had made certain remarks which had not been accepted quite as he had meant them to be by Mrs. Morgan. But now he would be able to advance proof—always a very satisfactory thing to a lawyer—in support of what he had said, to his wife.

There was still an hour to be got through before it would be time for Mr. Morgan to leave the office and catch his usual train home from Victoria Station. He

had already given all his instructions, and had wound up, as far as he was able, all those matters he himself had in hand at the moment. This being so he was pleased rather than sorry, as he might have been on an ordinary busy working day, to be told that another old acquaintance in his own profession, this time a certain Richard Munstead, desired to see him.

"Say I'll see him in two minutes," he said, and then sat down.

But he awaited this caller with much less pleasure than he had felt when awaiting the call of Robert Dunn, for the man about to be shown in—whom in his mind he, in common with everyone else, always called Dick Munstead—was a very different sort of lawyer to the prosperous, well-balanced country solicitor.

Munstead was only fifteen years older than John Morgan, but there was half a century of difference in the way they looked at life and regarded the profession which they both, in a sense, adorned.

Most men interested in such matters considered John Morgan old-fashioned and high-principled to the verge of eccentricity, but he was everything that was modern compared to Dick Munstead. To the older lawyer every reform in legal procedure had been an outrage on the majesty of that British law of which he regarded himself as an authorized, if humble, defender and upholder. To him the roll of solicitors of the Court of Chancery was a guild. He would have liked to see vested in the Law Society the actual power of life and death, in the case that is of peccant solicitors,—for he had the highest standard of professional probity.

As a man old Munstead was decidedly eccentric. No one knew where he lived, or how he spent his Sundays. His only pleasure was the drama, and he was known to

the attendants of every London theatre as the most constant of pitites. Of course he found much to condemn on the modern stage, and had been heard to deplore the fact that women's parts were no longer acted—as they had been in the golden age of the drama—by men or boys. Dick Munstead hated women, or at any rate thought he did, and yet from a legal point of view all that affected women—*qua* woman—interested him deeply. Although he was an authority on the marriage laws, his knowledge, unfortunately for himself, had not been of the kind that impresses clients, and it had been useful rather to other lawyers than to himself.

There was certainly very little in common between the two lawyers, and yet, some twenty-five years ago, when John Morgan was first married, Dick Munstead had been intimate with him and with his wife. He had known Mary as a baby, and had even bestowed on her a fine old Georgian silver rattle. Then suddenly he had drifted away, refusing the invitations Mrs. Morgan had pressed upon him. But she remembered him, and that kindly; when the two men met, Mr. Morgan always showed the old and no longer prosperous solicitor far more deference and respect than he did his younger and successful brethren in the law.

And now this deference and respect were specially called for. Dick Munstead had not been in the room a minute before his smouldering irritation at his one time friend's great prosperity burst out in a bitter allusion to what had long been a subject of difference between them, namely, the question of solicitors and their clients' banking accounts. John Morgan had always consistently supported measures intended to make the way of the dishonest lawyer as difficult as possible, and now, in answer to the other's outburst, he

gently expressed his conviction that such measures were highly desirable.

"I'm all against anything of the kind being done," said Munstead violently; "hard cases make bad law, we all know that! A solicitor is far more often in an unacknowledged, unofficial fiduciary position than the world at large has any notion of. Look at the way people come to us for advice about matters quite unconnected with law! Look at the way in which we have to use our own judgment of men's characters and motives—characters indifferent, motives bad, as they nearly always are!"

"Oh! come, Munstead, not always——"

"I said nearly always," the other snapped out. "Mark my words, Morgan, if this so-called reform takes place, the public will lose a great deal more money than do the few victims of the few rascals among us!"

"You know, Munstead, that in that matter you and I have always disagreed and always shall disagree," John Morgan spoke very mildly.

"Well, now, I'll put a case to you," the other cried, making a wry face, as he always did when roused or excited.

"I've got a client, or rather I *had* a client, the kind of silly, feckless, vain young woman that is sometimes produced by a shrewd hard north country couple. The parents were clients of my father, trusted him implicitly, had their little all out on mortgage—you know the kind of thing. My father drew up their wills and I accepted—the greater fool I—the position of executor, trustee, and all the rest of it. The whole amount was not more than £5,000, saved bit by bit by the father for his girl. You understand I'm talking of thirty years ago? Though they had been tolerably

comfortable themselves, they didn't approve of matrimony for anybody else. They died when she was still a young woman, and a very plain one at that. Rather to my surprise, she appeared to fall in with what she must have known were the old couple's wishes. She remained a spinster. I did the best I could with her little bit of money; the income was paid to her quarterly, and she lived well within it. By the way, her name was Peddle, Louisa Peddle."

"You would have been saved a great deal of trouble," interjected Mr. Morgan, dryly, "if there had been then a public trustee."

"Nonsense!" said the other testily, "you don't see my point at all! How could you when we haven't come to it? As long as the woman only possessed the small amount in my hands, everything went on all right. Unfortunately there befell her what most people would have called a rare piece of good fortune. She was advertised for—you know the kind of thing—and *I* saw the advertisement! I'm very sorry now that I did see it, for she might never have come across it, and I don't think the man who put it in, a low fellow called Rush—who ought long ago to have been struck off the rolls, and who'd gone to Australia, as I soon found out, under a black cloud—was at all anxious to find her. It turned out that some distant relative of her mother had left her a fortune, or, at any rate, what was certainly a fortune to her. Well, then our troubles began; it was no easy matter to get Rush to disgorge, but, luckily for me, I had a correspondent in the colonial town where the testator had been well known."

"Rush oughtn't to have been in a position to have the money," again interjected Morgan, but the other hurried on—

"To cut a long story short, my client got the money, over which she has, it appears, only a power of appointment, and then she hadn't been in enjoyment of the income for more than a month before she had three offers of marriage! Like the fool she had always been—and the old fool she had become—she married a man who came out of the blue, about whom I could learn nothing, and who, of course, managed to quarrel with me before the wedding-day.

"Well, she's off your hands now," observed Mr. Morgan rather wearily; "that surely's a thing to be thankful for, Munstead."

"Oh, but she's not off my hands—not by any manner of means. You forget that I'm still her trustee for the smaller sum, and I'm actually made to pay over the income to Rush! She got to know him—for he thought it worth his while to come over all the way from Australia about the other matter—and, somehow or other, he's wormed himself into her confidence, and that too, I suppose, of her idle, worthless husband!"

"I wonder this Rush didn't marry her himself," said Mr. Morgan, idly.

"He's married," said Mr. Munstead, briefly. "Besides Louisa Peddle was one to like something showy for her money. But now, Morgan, comes the point of my story. My fortunate client has had *another* legacy, a nice substantial little sum, left by a cousin of her father's; I've just proved the will, and I've got the handling of *that*. I tell you frankly I'm minded not to let her know anything about it as long as I can keep the knowledge from her. I haven't the slightest notion where she and her good-for-nothing husband are living. My only link with them is that rascal Rush, and I'm

not inclined at all to communicate with the woman through *him*."

"I don't see how you can help doing that!" Mr. Morgan was thinking what an odd cantankerous creature poor Munstead had become. Just the type of solicitor who must be saved from himself!

"I presume you think I'm quite wrong. Your one idea in my place would be to get rid of the responsibility."

Mr. Morgan smiled the smile of the man who knows that against his business methods, at any rate, nothing can be said.

"I think that by making any unnecessary delay you may be laying up a store of trouble for yourself. It's her money, after all——"

"Yes—but I'm blessed if I'll let Rush or the husband have the spending of it."

Mr. Morgan got up.

"I don't see how you'll be able to help that; you know what you said just now, Munstead, 'Hard cases,' eh?"

"I've said it before, and I'll say it again—no woman ought ever to come of age. They aren't fit to have the uncontrolled possession of money."

"Of course, it would be very nice if you could keep that new legacy—or, better still, bestow it on some more deserving young woman than your Miss—Miss—What did you say her name was, Munstead?"

The old lawyer looked up with sudden suspicion—was it possible that John Morgan was laughing at him?

"I oughtn't to have told you the story," he muttered, "try and forget it, Morgan; oblige me by putting it out of your mind."

"Of course! Of course!" said Mr. Morgan, quickly.

"I've already quite forgotten the name you mentioned——"

"And how's my friend, little Polly?" asked Mr. Munstead, with one of his rare twisted smiles. "She was a fine child, Morgan, and more boisterous than I'd have expected, knowing you."

"Oh, she's grown up into a very quiet young woman," said Mr. Morgan, and then he stopped short.

The news that Mary was going to be married would be of no real interest to old Munstead. Besides, really!—his way of talking about women was not of a nature to make any decent man anxious to mention his daughter to him. It were best that Dick Munstead should go on thinking of Mary as a beautiful, boisterous baby.

CHAPTER XIII

Not only Mr. Morgan's fond and admiring wife, but the two girls as well always looked forward eagerly to the weeks which the master of the house was to spend at home, but somehow, as each holiday came round, not even Mrs. Morgan found the time so delightful as she had thought it would be !

The prosperous lawyer had been born just too soon to look with anything but a rather impatient contempt on the various games and hobbies on which the men who regarded themselves as of his generation now spent their leisure. Walking was John Morgan's only relaxation, and now that his wife could no longer tramp long miles by his side as she had done when still a young woman, his daughters were generally pressed into his service, Jenny rather than Mary being his favourite companion.

Just now, however, Jenny was naturally absorbed in her sister and her sister's concerns, and Mrs. Morgan asked herself with some apprehension how dear John would spend the days, to every one but himself such eager busy days, till the wedding was safely over.

Then took place an occurrence which, if at another time it would have seriously disturbed her, just now brought with it the pleasing thought that it would give her husband something to think about and to do.

A considerable quantity of valuable glass in the kitchen garden, which was to Mr. Morgan perhaps his

favourite corner of the pretty property, had been maliciously broken and the fruit under it stolen. This had happened twice, and the last time the marauders had taken the trouble to write the head gardener of The Haven an anonymous letter. Similar depredations had taken place on a larger property some way off. The affair had proved an excellent excuse for the husband and wife to drive to Boxford on this, the first day of Mr. Morgan's holiday, in order to thresh the matter out thoroughly with the head of the county police.

As they drove along in the old-fashioned victoria which had been the first tangible sign of John Morgan's greatly increased prosperity, both husband and wife felt happy and at peace, and that in spite of the annoying nature of the errand which was taking them to the county town near by.

John Morgan, though he generally became bored before the end of his holidays, always enjoyed the first few days of freedom from Bedford Row, the more so that he never lost touch with the office. Even now his busy brain was employed in thinking over certain legal problems which had come to him by that morning's post. But he wisely did not allow these questions to worry him, and he lent more than half an ear to his wife's placid conversation.

As their careful coachman turned round the corner at the bottom of the hill, Mrs. Morgan looked with a rather regretful eye at George Glyn's pretty house, Rosedene.

"It does look a small place," she said, sighing a little. "However, Mary seems quite pleased with it, so I ought not to feel anything."

"It's not any smaller than the place we took when

we were first married," he replied, and did not add, or indeed even think, that Rosedene was a hundred times prettier and more suited to receive a bride than the dingy little house in which he and Mrs. Morgan had set up housekeeping in a north of London suburb.

"No, but then we didn't stay there over long," said his wife wistfully. "I expect Mary will still find Rosedene her home when she celebrates her silver wedding. George isn't the sort of man to go very far."

Mr. Morgan was surprised, and a trifle moved. As a rule his wife always stoutly took her future son-in-law's part, and would hear no word of criticism against him.

"Come, come," he said, "this won't do, my dear. Mary's quite old enough to choose for herself. She's had other chances, and she didn't avail herself of them."

"I know that," said Mrs. Morgan, still melancholy.

"Then, after all, Jane, we mustn't forget that George Glyn is an absolutely *safe* choice. Unless I'm very much mistaken,"—Mr. Morgan was naturally prudent, and his profession had made him more prudent—"George will never cause us a moment's anxiety. He'll never get into any of the difficulties and scrapes to which a certain type of medical man is peculiarly exposed."

"Lawyers are always thinking of what may happen instead of what is likely to happen!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan.

She sometimes surprised her husband with a shrewd remark which summed up, as it were, the experience which life teaches even the least imaginative.

"Yes," he answered, "of course we deal with the exceptions—and perhaps they are more common than

you, for one, would believe. Still, as far as I'm concerned, it's an immense comfort to me to feel that Mary's husband belongs to a type of man who never, or hardly ever, has occasion to go to a lawyer for advice."

"Well, if he ever does have occasion to do such a thing," said Mrs. Morgan, comfortably, "he won't have far to look for it, will he, my love?"

They were now passing Lilywood.

"Oh, John," she said suddenly, "I wonder if it would be worth while to tell the police about that poor Mrs. Burdmore's jewels. I saw her yesterday for the first time—and oh, my dear"—she lowered her voice for fear the coachman should hear what she was about to say—"she looked a regular figure of fun! She was wearing a blue satin jacket fastened with a very showy jewelled brooch, and her rings—well, I don't think she could have bent her fingers! She had a tray on the bed and she was cleaning some of her necklaces and bracelets with a wash-leather. I was quite sorry to think that Jenny spends so much time down there with her."

"Why let Jenny do it?" the father answered quickly. "I thought the woman was almost well again now."

"She's still very far from well," said Mrs. Morgan wisely ignoring her husband's question. As if any one could prevent Jenny from doing on the whole what Jenny wanted to do!

"Then you think her sister-in-law was not so much out after all in being afraid of burglars at Lilywood?"

"No, I'm sure it isn't safe for Miss Burdmore to be alone, as she often is for hours and hours, with no one in the house but 'Louisa,' as they all call her. Of course the charwoman must have talked—any one would. I don't say Mrs. Burdmore's jewels are as

valuable as they look; it would take an expert to say that"—here the cautious wife of the cautious lawyer asserted herself—"but some of them looked very good, and she told me what she'd paid for some of them. She must be quite well off!"

"I wonder if we'd better interfere," Mr. Morgan spoke thoughtfully, "I mean whether Burdmore wouldn't think it rather officious on my part to speak to the Boxford police about his private concerns."

"Indeed, I think he would be very glad," said his wife eagerly, "and a word from you would go further than anything he could say. Miss Burdmore was evidently quite nervous about being left alone. Her brother is going to London for the night to-morrow and she was talking of asking the charwoman to come in and sleep—not that the poor old woman would be of any use if there were burglars about!"

"Oh, well, in that case," said Mr. Morgan quickly, "of course I'll speak to the Inspector. For the matter of that, the police could keep an eye on Lilywood while watching our place. By the way, talking of Lilywood, whom do you think I saw yesterday, Jane?"

"How can you expect me to tell you that?" said Mrs. Morgan, good-humouredly; and then with a sudden flash of intuition, "I know," she cried, "young Robert Dunn, of Canterbury!"

"Young?" repeated Mr. Morgan, smiling. "He's not much younger than I am! Yes, Robert Dunn, whom I hadn't seen for two years. He came in to see me about a case—one of those cases that it's a sin not to settle out of court—he being on one side and I on the other, and so I spoke to him of our little friend Miss Burdmore."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Morgan, eagerly. Her feelings concerning Cynthia Burdmore had changed, curiously, during the last few days; she would not have cared to have analysed her feeling, but in her own secret mind the kind mistress of The Haven now characterized Cynthia as "sly," a word which to the British matron bears many meanings.

"Now, I wonder whether I ought to tell you what he told me," said Mr. Morgan, meditatively; but his wife felt no pang of possible disappointment. She knew well enough that when her John said "I wonder if I ought to tell you," he had already made up his mind that he *would* tell her.

"Yes," he said, deliberately. "To begin with, Dunn couldn't speak too highly of Miss Burdmore—in fact, he seemed to regret very much the circumstances which had led to her leaving them."

"And what were those circumstances?" asked his wife inquisitively.

"Do you remember telling me," said Mr. Morgan, with apparent irrelevance, "that you thought Miss Burdmore an unattractive little thing? Well, I wonder if what I'm going to tell you now will change your opinion?"

"Nothing could change my opinion," said Mrs. Morgan, firmly, "but of course I was only speaking for myself, John. I knew you didn't agree with me."

Again Mr. Morgan smiled, more good-humouredly than she.

"Well, it seems that the Dunns had a lad there, a ward in Chancery, a man who won't come into his money till he's twenty-five, and he went quite off his head over Miss Burdmore! Dunn declares that she didn't encourage him—she avoided him in every pos-

sible way, but in spite of everything they could do, he set up a regular persecution of her, and the end of it was she had to leave them. Dunn declared that she behaved admirably from first to last. He also said there was another fellow who was after her too during the short time she was there, but he behaved in a quieter, more reasonable fashion."

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Mrs. Morgan, getting quite red.

"Eh?" queried her husband mildly.

"What I mean," she went on, rather confusedly, "is that no woman can do that sort of thing without knowing she's doing it. Not all the evidence in the world would ever make me think that, John, so it's no use trying to do it."

"I'm not trying to do it," he said, much diverted. "I'm simply telling you what Dunn told me; and perhaps I ought to add that Mrs. Dunn quite agrees with him."

"Was that all he said about Miss Burdmore?" she asked, suddenly.

"How sharp Jane is!" thought the lawyer to himself. "It's only fair I should tell her——"

"Well, no," he said aloud. "Unluckily Miss Burdmore introduced her brother to this moonstruck youth, and Dunn didn't approve of the acquaintance, especially as he found out that Burdmore was trying to sell the young man a share in an orange farm in which it seems he has still retained an interest. All the same, Jane, I want you to understand that Dunn didn't blame Miss Burdmore for what occurred in that matter at all."

The carriage was turning into the High Street of Boxford before Mr. Morgan again spoke.

"I had another visitor yesterday," he said—"old

Richard Munstead, but he had nothing to say which would interest you. The poor fellow hasn't enough to do. He took up a lot of my time telling me an interminable story of some client of his—a woman who made a foolish marriage. He asked after you and Mary—reminded me what a boisterous baby she used to be."

CHAPTER XIV

TILL comparatively lately, Boxford had retained all the stately, remote charm of an eighteenth-century English country town; and even now the High Street, dominated by a low white and green group of buildings composing the ancient coaching inn, is still picturesque, although many a fine old house has been pulled down to make way for an ugly modern building of which the town-folk are foolishly proud.

But human nature in a little country town alters less than do the outward characteristics of the place; most country townsmen are apt, even now, to be as their fathers were, and this is especially the case with the old-established tradespeople of such a place. There the reverence for high professional standing, for respectably acquired wealth, still predominates over everything else.

The inhabitants of those substantial, often beautiful, old houses which form the High Street of Boxford, had the very highest opinion of the Morgan household, and especially of the solicitor himself. Each week a stream of what they would have called his "good money" flowed from Sunniland into the town, for Mrs. Morgan was the country tradesmen's ideal of what a lady should be; she dealt, that is, exclusively with her friends and neighbours, and did not look with favour on the great London emporiums and their discounts.

So it was that Mr. and Mrs. Morgan's drive up the

High Street of Boxford resembled something of a triumphal progress, and this, it must be admitted, was very pleasant to the lady. She was not often able to show her husband to her friendly neighbours, and she enjoyed doing so.

Wherever the carriage stopped, an obsequious shopman, generally the master himself, hurried out on to the high raised pavement eager to take Mrs. Morgan's order, and assure her of his best attention; but, pleasing as this was to the two principals concerned, Mr. Morgan soon grew tired of hearing "I hope I see you well, ma'am," followed inevitably by the "You're quite a stranger to Boxford now, sir!"

At last Mr. Morgan suggested that while his wife did her shopping he might as well go to the police-station, and, though she was secretly disappointed, she at once assented.

In nothing more than in his dealings with the local police is the position in a country neighbourhood of such a man as was John Morgan demonstrated. Smaller folk are treated with scant ceremony, but Mr. Morgan was received with all possible respect by the Inspector, and his account of the depredations which had been made on his garden and greenhouses was listened to with mingled indignation and sympathetic attention. The ill-written, ill-spelt, anonymous letter which had been received by his gardener was conned as if it were a State document, and he had the pleasant, though by no means unusual, sensation of finding the man he had come specially to see more than willing to fall in with all his wishes. In fact it was suggested that many more men should be stationed in the grounds of The Haven than Mr. Morgan thought at all necessary.

The solicitor then bethought himself of Lilywood. If the Inspector had so many men to spare, why shouldn't Sunniland, for a time at least, be regularly patrolled each night? Some months before, as Mr. Morgan now reminded the Inspector, a burglary had taken place at Sunniland, but the lawyer was not altogether surprised at the brief answer he received. "That was a case of insurance, Mr. Morgan; the people burgled themselves!"

"Well, there's nothing of the kind to be feared from the present tenants of Lilywood. Although the Burdmores keep there a considerable amount of jewelry, they are not even insured. I know that, for I took the trouble to inquire. And then, even if they were, poor Mrs. Burdmore is in no state to have any fright or shock."

"Oh, is Burdmore the name?" said the police official smiling, "then I expect I know the gentleman. He came in and saw me one day last week about something or other. He seemed very pleasant-spoken—colonial, I take it. He gave me some sound advice about my second boy—why, he did more than that, he sent me along a letter to a friend of his who he thought might be useful to the lad in Melbourne! I'll certainly see that an eye is kept on the place, especially while the ladies are alone there."

Mr. Morgan left the police-station in high good humour, not only with himself but with the rest of the world, and so he did not raise the objection which he would otherwise have done to a suggestion made by his wife that they should together pay an overdue call at Boxford Rectory.

Still, once there, he could not help feeling glad that only the lady of the house was at home. Mr. Morgan

regarded the clergy of the Established Church as among the most unbusinesslike members of the community, and so, while respecting their cloth, he seldom approved of their sense.

In Mrs. Pomfret, the wife of Boxford's mild rector, he recognized a shrewd, capable woman, and she soon gave a proof of her sense and prudence. for after the Morgans had been in the Rectory a few moments, she turned their call to account.

"As you know," she said, "I don't make it a rule to call on all new comers at Sunniland, but my husband met a Mr. Burdmore last week at the Dalys', and he found him so especially agreeable that he thought he would make a very pleasant addition to our garden party. I believe there's an invalid wife and a sister. Do you know anything of them?"

"Yes, we know them quite well," it was Mrs. Morgan who answered, and as she did so she could not help half-smiling to herself—her knowledge as to Miss Burdmore had been certainly increased during the last two hours. "I think you would like them both, I mean the brother and sister, but I fear there is no chance of Miss Burdmore's coming to your party, for her poor sister-in-law is entirely confined to her room, and either the husband or his sister always stays at home with Mrs. Burdmore. They are most devoted in their care of her, and never go out together."

"How very kind of them!" exclaimed Mrs. Pomfret sympathetically, "and how sad! The rector thought this Mr. Burdmore must be very much attached to his wife by the way he spoke of her, but we had hoped she would be well enough to go out. Does she care for visitors?"

Mrs. Morgan hesitated. Sunniland, as she well knew,

was outside the Boxford pale. The Pomfrets had the best of excuses—their own exceptionally large parish—for not cultivating social relations with the strange unorthodox little community; and even Mrs. Morgan found it easy to imagine what the clever, capable, determined-looking lady now before her would think of “poor Louisa,” and her silly little vanities and oddities; but it was a feeling of loyalty to Sunniland rather than to these particular people that prompted her carefully worded and guarded answer.

“Poor Mrs. Burdmore is far too ill to receive visitors, but I’m quite sure Miss Burdmore would dispense with the formality of your calling on her. Why not write and ask her? If she can be persuaded to accept for herself as well as for her brother, we shall be delighted to give her a seat in our carriage.”

As the husband and wife walked along the stone paths of the beautiful churchyard, back to the High Street, Mrs. Morgan exclaimed, “Mr. Burdmore is becoming quite a popular favourite. I shouldn’t have thought he was at all the sort of man the rector would have liked!”

“Success in everything,” said the solicitor, with what his wife for the moment thought entire irrelevance, “is only obtained by concentration. Mr. Burdmore has made it, I fancy, his business in life for a good many years to make himself agreeable. I expect he early discovered the great truth that it’s better to have friends than enemies. He’s actually made friends with Inspector Plumfield——”

“He has very pleasant manners and he’s very amusing,” said Mrs. Morgan, slightly on the defensive; “also you must admit, John, that he’s an excellent husband.”

"No doubt he is that. All the same, I didn't like the account Dunn gave me of the man's dealings with that lad at Canterbury; of course there isn't very much to get hold of, for the young fellow does not come into his money for another year or so—still, this proposal of Burdmore's to sell him a share of his orange farm in Florida was not very pretty under all the circumstances. It made the sister—whom I don't blame, mark you—appear to have acted as a decoy duck."

"What a horrible idea!" exclaimed his wife. She waited a moment, then added, for she was an honest woman, "Without thinking Miss Burdmore as attractive as some people seem to do, I've never supposed there was any real harm in her, John."

When Mrs. Morgan, late that same afternoon, went up to her bedroom to rest, she walked over to her writing-table and, sitting down, took up one of the cards of invitation to her daughter's marriage. Then she drew the large envelope which fitted the card towards her, and addressed it: "Richard Munstead, Esq., 3, London Wall, London, E.C."

Dick Munstead belonged to a very happy past as far as Mrs. Morgan was concerned, and she thought ever kindly of the now eccentric and always lonely man. How well she could recall him, sitting in the garden of what had been her first married home! She remembered very well the day he had brought baby Mary the splendid rattle—a fine, even a valuable, piece of old silver, as she had discovered much later. At the time she had thought it his way of returning the hospitality shown him by the little household, and she had been a little surprised that he had brought the child a second-hand, instead of a new, rattle.

She also remembered with uncomfortable vividness the last time Richard Munstead had been to her house, and in her heart she knew well enough why he had not come again; but at no time had it seemed to Mrs. Morgan necessary that her John should share that knowledge.

The last time she had seen Dick Munstead had been on a spring Sunday, some twenty-three years ago. John Morgan had been away from home for a few days—in itself a sufficiently remarkable occurrence to remember—over some business in the country. Mr. Munstead, not knowing this, had dropped in to supper, and she, the then youthful matron Jane, had done a foolish thing. The kind, half-maternal interest it was her instinct to feel for the lonely and unhappy had made her question Dick Munstead in somewhat intimate fashion—"Why don't you marry," she had said, half in jest, half in earnest, "and have a nice home of your own?"

Even now, over all these years, the colour in Mrs. Morgan's smooth cheeks deepened as she remembered the man's muttered answer.

"So I would if I could find me someone exactly your counterpart!"

There had been no jesting note in the words, and to her agitated surprise, to her then angry pain, he had gone on with fierce invectives against a Providence which had given John Morgan everything, and him, Dick Munstead, nothing.

Then he had begged her pardon, miserably, and rushed out of the house.

She had asked him to come again more than once, but to her relief he had always refused. The thing had left a painful impression on her mind. She would have given much that it had not happened. He never again

came to the house, and rather to her surprise her husband had not seemed to notice his defection. She knew that the two men met at intervals, but she herself had tried to forget him.

But now? Surely now was the time to be in complete charity with all the world, and she felt really kindly to this man who was after all so old a friend—and then he had inquired after Mary. . . .

Sitting down she wrote :

“DEAR MR. MUNSTEAD,

“I hear you have not forgotten the ‘Little Polly’ of over twenty years ago. I write to ask if you will do us the great pleasure of coming to her marriage, which will take place, as you will see by the enclosed, on July the twenty-ninth.”

She waited for a time, her pen poised in her hand, and then, with an inward tremor, she added the words,

“Believe me to remain,

“Your affectionate old friend,

“JANE MORGAN.”

After slipping the note into the invitation envelope, Mrs. Morgan wrote on the outside, “two enclosures,” and then she did a thing of which she was slightly ashamed. She went into her husband’s dressing-room and took from the wall a faded, most people would have said a rather absurd, photograph of herself, which had been taken just after Mary her eldest child’s birth. Standing before the looking-glass, she compared what she now was with what she knew that old portrait only recalled very slightly. Amazing the change—the change between nine-and-twenty and fifty-three!

Mrs. Morgan never showed more truly the good stuff she was made of than when she put a stamp on that

large envelope, and decided beyond possibility of recall that the invitation to Dick Munstead should stand.

And then, having thus sacrificed her vanity—if that be not too harsh a word—on the altar of old friendship and kindness, she dismissed from her mind Richard Munstead and that long ago part of her life with which he had been in a sense closely associated, and lay down on her bed.

But as Mrs. Morgan lay there she found it difficult to rest. Instead, her mind dwelt on the inmates of Lilywood; and the problem they presented to her became very pressing. What Robert Dunn had told her husband disturbed her; it had left, as such a story was bound to leave on the mind of such a woman as was Mrs. Morgan, a very disagreeable impression. Miss Burdmore might have been as free from blame as her late employer evidently believed her to have been concerning the young man's infatuation, but Mrs. Morgan felt that she would rather have heard Mrs. Dunn's account than that of the kindly Robert. Men, even the best of them, are so—so odd where a young woman is concerned. . . . In any case the brother had not behaved well.

CHAPTER XV

CYNTHIA BURDMORE woke with a sudden start. The little room in which she was sleeping led out of Louisa's larger bed-chamber; the windows of both looked due east, and through the thin, light curtains the newly risen sun shone redly.

Here, as in every room in Lilywood, the furniture was old and curious. The small bed on which Cynthia was lying was of carved wood; and her few personal possessions—the linen much mended and darned, telling a tale of frugality and self-respecting poverty—were arranged neatly in a high cabinet.

Clasping her hands together with an instinctive movement of agitation—almost of fear—she sat up and listened, her face filled with a watchful anxiety which, almost always there when she was alone, was banished in the presence of those casual visitors who came and went to and from Lilywood.

On the other side of the thin wall there rose the sound of heavy, irregular breathing; then Louisa was asleep—it was not Louisa who had made the sound which had so suddenly awakened her.

Gradually Cynthia became conscious of a faint unmistakable odour, that of something burning; and at the same moment there rose, floating up from below, from where the kitchen and scullery were situated, the sound of cautious footsteps going to and fro, and then that of the kitchen table being pushed along the floor.

But she did not leap out of bed as most women would have done in her place. She only listened more intently, if possible, than before, and the look of watchful, frowning anxiety deepened in her face. She turned and drew her little silver watch from under her pillow, and saw that it was only a quarter to five; then, resting her face on the palm of her soft, small hand, she began thinking deeply.

What could Chris be doing down there? What preparation was he making for what she now felt sure was going to take place the next night?

Cynthia was only too well aware how completely Chris dominated her, how entirely she had become his thing, his tool,—but up to now there had always been the unspoken compact that she should receive his entire confidence.

What was he hiding from her now, what preparations was he making, above all what was he burning? Cynthia Burdmore had trained herself to live in the present and in the future, never in the past, but she had a Bluebeard's chamber full of what were to her very awful memories, and she alone knew how much her woman's wit and natural cunning had helped Chris Burdmore in the past. If she were to help him adequately now, she must be prepared. She dreaded with a great dread the trusting to what Chris called his "luck."

Then there leapt on her a sudden fear, an intolerable suspicion. In all their comings and goings—and they had been great travellers—she had always, much to Burdmore's annoyance, managed to preserve and keep together certain humble little relics connected with her past life. These things were of no value and of no interest to any one but herself, but she clung to them

passionately. Wherever she went they travelled with her, being contained in a small brass-bound rose-wood box which had been her mother's, the mother who had died when she was only a child, from whom she had inherited the delicate elusive charm, that dangerous power of attraction which stood her in such valuable stead with those with whom fate—and Chris—threw her in contact.

Chris had more than once urged her very seriously to get rid of the box, or rather of its contents, but so far she had always resisted his wish. Why should she destroy the faded daguerreotypes of her parents, the little bundle of careless, harmless love-letters, the only love-letters she had ever received, and—certain other things?

When they were going to Lilywood, Chris had again appealed to her. There were circumstances, so he had reminded her, which now made it very important that these things should be destroyed; but Cynthia had shaken her head. and Burdmore, as he always did when he came up against a certain side of her character, had given in with a philosophical shrug.

With beating heart, and eyes filled with tears, she asked herself whether it were possible that, on the eve of taking perhaps the greatest risk they had ever taken in a dual life which had been full of risks, he had determined to destroy everything which might become a weapon in the hands of those who represent the law-abiding world against which he and Cynthia had waged such an unequal if so far so successful a fight.

She got up, ran across the room, and there unlocked and flung open the lower part of the Italian cabinet, in which she kept her few personal possessions.

The box lay before her, pushed away in the corner

exactly as she had placed it on the day when they had all first arrived in Sunniland. Cynthia was very seldom tempted to look at the relics that she kept so carefully in all her wanderings; the memories they recalled had been pushed down deep into her heart, and she shrank from bringing them to the surface.

But now, so great was the relief of finding her suspicions groundless, that the tears which had filled her eyes rolled down her cheeks. She felt miserably ashamed of having suspected Chris of such unkindness. And yet he was right! It would not do to keep these things here. In view of what might happen to-morrow, her box must be hidden away, more securely. . . .

To-morrow? The thought of what to-morrow would bring forth turned her mind back sharply to the present. Wrapping a thin dressing-gown about her, Cynthia opened the door which gave on to the passage and went swiftly, silently downstairs. Chris would doubtless be angry with her for coming to see what he was doing, but she had decided to brave his annoyance. Out of how many tight corners had they escaped simply because each had known the other's exact mind!

For a moment she stood in the middle of the studio, her nostrils filled with the acrid smell of burning. Then, walking on tip-toe, for she wished to surprise him in what he was doing, she opened the door giving on to what were the servants' quarters of Lilywood, and passed down through the little pantry into the kitchen beyond.

Across the hot bars of the gas stove various odds and ends of some thick black material—it looked like black felt—lay shrivelling, and beyond, standing by the clean well-scrubbed kitchen table, she saw Christopher Burdmore fully dressed, his figure bathed in the bright light

of the early morning sun. As he heard the door open behind him, she saw him thrust something, with a quick movement, into his jacket pocket. Then he turned round, and showed her a rather pale, pinched and tired face.

Cynthia did not advance further into the kitchen. She stood, her slender figure framed in the door. "Chris, what are you doing?" she asked quietly. "What is it you are burning?"

He made no answer; instead, he turned quickly round, and she saw that he was sweeping up with his hand a few almost invisible shreds of black material. On the white surface of the table lay the open scissors with which he had evidently been cutting something out of the stuff of which the remaining pieces were lying on the red-hot bars of the stove.

At last, "I wish you wouldn't always interfere!" he exclaimed irritably.

Cynthia stepped down on to the brick floor. She turned the gas lower. "You'll spoil the stove," she said briefly, "look, the bars are getting quite bent!" A piece of the black stuff which he had evidently desired to destroy was hanging over the side of the stove out of reach of the intense heat; she touched it gingerly.

"Don't do that," he said quickly. "Put it further on—I want it all to be burnt up, and as quickly as possible."

"But what is it, Chris? Where did you get it? I'm sure I've never had any thick woollen stuff like that!"

"I found it in a drawer in my bed-room," he spoke hurriedly, unwillingly, "just one oblong piece. There's nothing else like it in the house—I've looked. There are some other pieces of material in the same drawer, but nothing black."

She turned and faced him without saying anything, but he saw the look in her dark eyes, and his hand went unwillingly to his pocket. With an impatient exclamation, he drew out of it what looked like a black rat-skin, and threw it on the table. Cynthia drew nearer, and stared down at the strange-looking thing.

"What is it?" she said, nervously. "Why there's a hole in it!"

"There are two holes in it," said Burdmore, grimly, "can't you see what it is?"

"It is—why, of course, it's a mask!"

She conquered her repulsion, and with hesitating hand spread the thing flatly out on the table.

"But surely something else will have to be done to it," she said in a low voice; "is there nothing *I* can do, Chris?"

"No," he said, shortly, "I'm a good enough needleman to do what has to be done, and I don't mean to do it here."

"Then it *is* for to-night?" she asked, looking up at him. Two spots of red had come into her face, and her eyes were intensely bright.

"How you do hate her!" he said, and a curious smile came over his eyes, his full-lipped mouth. "I never can see why you dislike poor Louisa so much."

"Don't you?" she answered drily. Then with sudden passion, "Don't hide things from me, Chris; I can't bear it! It's the one thing I can't stand!"

"I didn't mean to tell you till just before I left," he said, slowly, "but now that you do know, we may as well talk over matters and arrange to do the thing properly."

"Yes," she said patiently, and then she shivered—it was still quite early, and she was lightly clad.

"Come into the other room." He spoke with sudden concern, almost tenderness, in his voice. "It's damp out here, in spite of the stove: you oughtn't to have turned the gas off."

They passed through into the studio.

"Have you still that prescription which the Dunns' doctor gave you?" he said. "I mean the sleeping draught."

"Yes," she said. "Why?"

"Because you had better give one to Louisa to-night. It would make everything easier. You can tell her Whitby ordered it; she loves medicine, and she doesn't think he gives her half enough."

"Yes. but Chris, what would happen if Mr. Whitby——"

"Cynthia! Think of what you're saying!" He looked at her intently.

She blushed; Chris did not often have cause to rebuke her for such stupidity,

"I'm tired this morning, horribly tired," she pleaded.

"But you mustn't be tired—you must pull yourself together! We may not have another opportunity for saying anything—I mean to go to town fairly early, and I've already arranged to see Rush and spend the evening with him."

"That horrible man who—who——"

"Yes, who gave poor Louisa away. Rush may be very useful later on—it was he who drew up Louisa's will, I mean the one she made on her wedding day. He will be with me when I shall telephone to you about nine o'clock to-night."

"Why are you going to do that?" she asked.

"Because I want the fact that I *did* telephone to you from London put on record. If the worst comes

to the worst, you can arrange for Mrs. Muxlow to hear our talk, but I hope to get a better witness—in fact, our young friend Peter Whitby. I'll call at Rosedene on my way to the station and tell them that you will be alone to-night, and that I should take it as a great kindness if one of them would look in after dinner and just see if you and Louisa are all right. Mrs. Muxlow refuses to sleep here, doesn't she?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, "but she'll stay late, till after ten o'clock. Must Peter Whitby be brought into this matter, Chris.?" There was a shamed inflexion in her low voice.

"Yes, if I say so," he said, sharply. "You've always been over particular about such things—a sight too pernickety, as my poor old Dad used to say."

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. MORGAN had determined that Jenny should see less of the Burdmores, and yet the very next day that she so resolved, her younger daughter, for the first time, paid an evening call at Lilywood.

Whitby and Glyn had both dined at The Haven, and after dinner, it being a very fine night, the two young men, with Mary and Jenny, walked out of the grounds and along the country road. It was then that Whitby suggested, to the surprise of two out of the three who were with him, that they should all go down the hill to Lilywood.

"I think we should find Mrs. Burdmore downstairs," he explained, "for she promised me she would come down to-day or to-morrow. Burdmore's in town to-night, and if I go and sit with 'poor Louisa' for a bit, perhaps we could persuade Miss Burdmore to come out and have a little walk with you. She doesn't get out half enough, and I know she's been shut up all to-day with her sister-in-law."

"I don't think she'll come out," said Glyn, slowly; "at least, I feel pretty sure you won't be able to persuade her to do so. She never leaves the house when her brother's out."

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't go in and see if she would care to come out!" The words were spoken in Jenny's high young voice, and it ended in its being

Jenny and Whitby who rattled at the gate of Lilywood, Mary and George walking slowly on alone.

Mrs. Muxlow, the charwoman who was generally only there in the morning, unlocked the gate.

"Miss Burdmore's upstairs with the missis," she said, "but I'll go and tell her you're here," and then she hurried them through the front door into the large unlighted studio, now filled with eerie shadows in the moonlight.

As they stood there, both Jenny and Peter began to feel rather foolish. It was quite early—barely nine—but what if Cynthia, tired out with her long tedious day's attendance on her sister-in-law, had already gone to bed? A feeling of resentment rose up in Jenny's heart against her companion. It was he who had desired to come to Lilywood—he who could not keep away from Cynthia Burdmore, even when he was the guest of other people.

"It's awfully quiet," she said at last, almost in a whisper; "they must feel very lonely when Mr. Burdmore is away. I'm glad father spoke to the police about it."

"Eh?" said Whitby, indifferently. He was trying to hear what was going on upstairs, straining his ears for a sound of Cynthia's movements.

Suddenly there came the slow, cadenced sounds of a man's footsteps passing up and down the solitary road outside.

"Listen!" exclaimed Jenny. "That's one of the policemen father asked to come over from Boxford to-night. It doesn't seem very likely that the people who stole our fruit and broke our glass will come to-night of all nights, when they must know, however

stupid they are—and I don't suppose they're stupid at all—that Sunniland is being regularly patrolled.”

“But why should a policeman be down here?” asked Whitby. “Of course, the men sent to do the job should have been posted in the garden of The Haven.”

“Why, I told you just now that father had spoken to the inspector about Lilywood. Miss Burdmore said the other day how horribly nervous she felt when her brother was away, because of Mrs. Burdmore's jewels, so the moment father learned that he was going to London to-day he told the police. It would be an awful thing if a burglar broke into this house just as Mrs. Burdmore is getting really well again.”

Whitby smiled; he was beginning to feel more at his ease. The mere knowledge that Cynthia was near, that he would see her in a few moments, was enough to make him glad.

Then his eyes having become accustomed to the dim light, he suddenly saw that on the top of the bow-fronted Sheraton sideboard, which was one of the most precious possessions of Lilywood's absent owner, there stood a bottle of medicine.

It was within easy reach of his hand; and he took it up, curious to see if he could read by the light of the moon. Yes, quite clearly inscribed on the white label pasted on the bottle were the words, written in the neat handwriting of the Boxford chemist—“The sleeping draught. To be taken when already in bed.”

Whitby felt annoyed, unreasonably so. After all, he now had charge of Mrs. Burdmore's case, and Glyn ought not to have prescribed for her without at least telling him that he had done so! Then it struck him that he was perhaps mistaken; this was doubtless

an old prescription. If that was so, Cynthia must be told kindly but firmly that nothing must be administered to Mrs. Burdmore without his (Whitby's) permission being asked.

"Why, Mr. Whitby, how could Mrs. Muxlow leave you in the dark?"

Whitby started; Cynthia's soft voice sounded as if it were in his ear. How quietly she must have come down the little staircase! Then he looked at her. Her voice, or so it seemed to him, was not quite as usual.

"My brother's away in London," she went on, "but do sit down a moment." As she spoke she struck a match. Whitby and Jenny heard the sound of the glass funnel being taken off the lamp, and both, watching her, saw that as she put the light to the wick she glanced at the clock, which now marked three minutes to nine.

Jenny came out of the shadow. "Let me help you," she said, and Cynthia turned towards her with a quick movement.

"Miss Morgan?" and in the words, so quietly uttered, the girl, though not the man, read a good deal of wondering surprise as well as a lack of welcome in Miss Burdmore's low voice. Jenny was startled by the other's look of delicacy—of feverish illness; though Cynthia, to-night, was very pale, her eyes shone brightly, and her lips, perhaps because of her pallor, looked bright red.

After that first word, Miss Burdmore, if she had really entertained any such feeling as that which Jenny Morgan's over-sensitive ear had detected, quickly put it from her, for nothing could be more cordial and gracious than her subsequent manner to the young girl.

"We walked up the road with George and Mary," explained Jenny, "and knowing you were alone, Mr. Whitby suggested that we should come in and pay you a little call."

"That was really kind of you!" there was a touch of unaffected gratitude in Cynthia Burdmore's voice, and she included both her visitors in her glance. "The hours do seem long when Chris is away, but to-night I've got old Mrs. Muxlow to stay on. We are so far from any other house—in fact Rosedene," now she turned exclusively to Whitby, "is the nearest house, and that can hardly be said to be within earshot, can it?"

In ordinary circumstances, Jenny Morgan would then have spoken of the police patrol which had been established that night at Sunniland, but the girl was taking very little heed to what Cynthia was actually saying. Jealousy, especially jealousy which is as yet instinctive and unacknowledged, is often amazingly prescient. Still standing back in the shadow, Jenny debated within herself as to what were the real relations between the two people who were now talking before her. Was Cynthia Burdmore as ignorant as she pretended to be of how different Peter Whitby looked when she was present to when she was absent?

Then Jenny caught herself up. How foolish she was! Of course Cynthia had no power to judge how Peter looked when she was not there—but she, Jenny, knew, and the knowledge pained her deeply. For the first time in her young life Jenny Morgan told herself what most people have constant reason to tell themselves, namely, that it is indeed fortunate—poor human nature being what it is—that the face is but a lying index to the mind. Jenny Morgan, in her thin pink

dinner dress and black lace scarf wound round her head, looked not only enchantingly pretty but as if she hadn't a care in the world.

"Now, Miss Burdmore, what does this mean?" Whitby took up the bottle of medicine. He spoke quite playfully, but with an under-current of annoyance very perceptible to his hearers.

Cynthia grew suddenly red, as she was apt to do when moved by emotion. She did not answer for a moment, and Whitby went on, "If Mrs. Burdmore insists on having anything of the kind, you must send for me! You know some days ago I told you that she would become sleepless if we couldn't manage to get her out—but this sort of thing will do her no good."

"The sleeping draught is not for Louisa,"—Cynthia spoke in a low, reluctant tone; "I've been having very bad nights lately, and so I had an old prescription made up."

"Oh, those old prescriptions!" Whitby laughed vexedly. "They ought to be, and soon they will be, I hope, forbidden by law!"

Miss Burdmore was saved a reply, for the telephone bell rang, a loud, prolonged, insistent ring. Jenny thought that a look of relief swept over Cynthia's face; but who could be telephoning to the Burdmores at this time of night? Jenny looked meaningly at Whitby; surely they ought to be moving, but the young man was gazing, with that absorbed, intent look Jenny had already learnt to know so well on his face, at the slender figure which now stood bending over the telephone instrument.

"Is that you, Chris? . . . Yes, yes . . . Everything's all right. Louisa seems pretty well this evening . . . Yes . . . it's come, and Mr. Whitby is very

much shocked that I should be taking such a thing as a sleeping draught . . .”

“Is your brother speaking from London?” asked Whitby, indifferently.

“Mr. Whitby asks whether you’re speaking from London.” . . . She waited a moment, and then turned with a bright smile, the first smile there had been on her face that evening: “He’s been dining at Simpson’s with a friend!” she exclaimed, “and he says he would like to speak to you, Mr. Whitby. He’s always rather anxious when he leaves us like this alone.”

Whitby got up. “Well, he needn’t be at all anxious to-night,” he said, “for Sunniland is being regularly patrolled by the police. Mr. Morgan is determined to catch those people who have done such wanton injury to his glasshouses and he’s had a hint that they mean to come again to-night. While he was about it, he told the Inspector that you were nervous about your sister-in-law’s jewels, so they’re keeping a special look-out round this house as well.”

Cynthia Burdmore allowed the telephone receiver, which she was still holding in her hand and to her ear, to drop on the table. An extraordinary change came over her face; her eyes seemed to grow larger, to dilate with a terror to which the two watching her had no clue. Twice she opened her lips and then shut them again.

Then, perhaps feeling that she was betraying herself, she covered her face with her hands and sat down. “Forgive me,” she muttered, “I’m sorry to be so silly, but I felt giddy.” Then, after an almost imperceptible pause, “Ah! now I feel better, much better. Mr. Whitby,” she motioned him to come forward, “do please tell Chris what you have just told me; he’s

waiting now for you at the other end of the telephone. He'll get impatient." Her voice died away.

Whitby quickly came forward and proceeded to do what she asked. He instinctively felt that she would rather be spared any comment, any expression of sympathy. A feeling of hatred for the woman upstairs, lying neither ill nor well, took possession of him. Mrs. Burdmore, with her affectations, her absorption in self, her cruel selfishness, was a vampire sapping the life and strength of her fragile sister-in-law! No wonder Cynthia could not sleep—no wonder she grew giddy.

And then why should Burdmore bother to telephone in this futile, silly fashion? Whitby took up the receiver with a feeling of considerable impatience. "Are you there?" he said, loudly; "are you there, Burdmore? Hullo! Hullo! Can you hear me?" . . . but there came no answering word, only the confused murmuring sounds which are so irritatingly usual in the country telephone service close to London.

He waited a moment, and then hung the receiver up again. "They've cut us off," he said, shortly. "It's only a three-minute call from London."

Cynthia sprang up, "Oh, but I *must* get through again!" She spoke in a low, collected voice, but the face turned towards Whitby was drained of colour. She pushed him aside gently and began ringing with a quick, nervous movement. Even to Jenny it seemed a long time before the exchange answered.

"You've cut us off!" Cynthia said. And then in a determined, and in what Jenny secretly told herself must be her "governess" voice, added, "You must find out what number was ringing me up, and get me on again."

"They can't do that," observed Whitby under his breath, and he heard the scornful mutter of the telephone operator's voice conveying the same information.

Cynthia put the receiver down. "I wonder," she said, musingly, still without looking round, "if it's possible to get a wire through to London to-night?" She was speaking to herself, unaware that her words were uttered aloud.

Something in Whitby's heart responded to her anguish of suspense. He felt, if obscurely then none the less clearly, that she was terribly distressed.

"I think I can promise you to get a wire through if you really wish it," he said quickly.

"You are very kind," and with the utterance of these few words there came a note of despair and terror in her voice. What was it she desired to say to her brother that would not keep till even the next morning? Whitby's troubled mind passed in rapid review the desultory talk of the last few minutes. Neither he nor Jenny Morgan had said anything of the slightest importance. Poor Cynthia, however overstrung and nervous, could scarcely think it of paramount importance to reassure her brother as to the safety of the house. Chris Burdmore took life very easily; and, though a kind husband and brother, he was the last man to worry himself about a half imaginary danger.

Jenny also was looking at Cynthia with a good deal of surprise and curiosity. She also was asking herself what could have happened in the last few minutes to bring about so complete a change in Cynthia. Then her quick mind leapt to an explanation which satisfied her. Doubtless Burdmore had told his sister something through the telephone which had disturbed her greatly and made her feel it important that she should

see him. She remembered the words her father had used concerning Cynthia's part in her brother's life. Perhaps Burdmore was even now in some kind of scrape. . . .

"I can send on any telegram you wish through our telephone," she said, suddenly. "Father has a Post Office account."

By the dim light of the one lamp Whitby saw that Miss Burdmore's face had assumed a more natural expression. There was now more colour in her lips; her eyes began to lose their terror-stricken look.

"If you would do that—at once—I should be really grateful," she said. "The truth is I want my brother to come back to-morrow morning without fail. I ought to have said so at once instead of waiting till he had spoken to Mr. Whitby. You see, there has come an important business letter for him, and before he sends an answer to it I must discuss it with him. If the worst comes to the worst, I suppose I could get to London to-night?"

"Why, yes—of course you could," Whitby looked at her in amazement. "Of course you know where he's spending the night?" he asked.

She nodded, and suddenly the telephone bell rang again.

All three started, all three had the feeling that an intolerable weight had been lifted off their minds.

Cynthia took up the receiver. She did not attempt to disguise the joy, the relief in her voice. "Yes—yes . . . We were cut off. Don't do anything till you've seen me again . . . Come back to-morrow . . . Yes, he's still here, and Chris—are you listening? You needn't give us a thought to-night . . . Lilywood is being watched by the police—" She waited a moment.

"Yes, isn't it funny. Mr. Morgan saw the Inspector, it was very kind of him." Her sentences came out in quick, hurried jerks.

Whitby and Jenny got up. "We must be going now," said Jenny.

"No, no," said Cynthia, "not yet." Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkling. "My brother seems really anxious to speak to you, Mr. Whitby——"

But Whitby felt unaccountably irritated. He had no wish to speak to Cynthia's brother; an obscure jealousy of Burdmore—the selfish, buoyant, pleasure seeker—who dominated so completely both his wife and his sister, took possession of him. The half-hour he had looked forward to so much had been spoilt by all this absurd telephoning. Still, he could scarcely refuse to do what he was asked, and so, rather ungraciously, he came forward to the telephone.

Then something very odd happened, something which, trifling as it was, he has never forgotten, but to which even now Peter Whitby has no clue. With startling distinctness he heard the words, "Are you there? Are you there?" and then without giving him a moment for reply, "If that's so, then I say curse old Morgan and his blasted interference with other people's business!"—and then silence, or rather again the confused murmuring sounds which showed that once more the communication had been cut off.

CHAPTER XVII

It was a pale, a quiet, and apparently a very composed Cynthia who opened the gate to Chris Burdmore at eight the next morning.

She had been up all night, feeling no desire to go to bed, but she did not tell him so, for she was one of that small group of human beings who possess the power to keep their thoughts, their emotions, their hopes and fears, hidden even from those whom they love best and in whom they have complete confidence. Such a human attribute as habitual truthfulness from want of use becomes atrophied, and this was the case with the woman whom Peter Whitby regarded as being frank and impulsive to a fault.

Miss Burdmore had debated long within herself as to whether she should now confess her agitation of the night before, but she knew from long experience that most human riddles can only be solved with the help of some sort of clue, and neither Peter Whitby nor Jenny Morgan could possibly have any clue to what had moved her to such an extremity of fear. Besides, the recital of what had happened would only annoy Chris. So she kept silence.

Burdmore also said very little at first, but he soon sat down and began eating heartily the excellent breakfast Cynthia had prepared for him.

Then, at last, he spoke. "Well, I suppose we ought to feel very happy this morning! I've not often had

such a jar as I had yesterday evening. Curse old Morgan—that's what I say! I thought solicitors never interfered in other people's business!" Then he began to laugh: "Something really funny happened as I came along just now. I met the policeman who's been guarding you so carefully, and so I had to give him my last half-crown! He's gone home now, poor chap. I think he thought I might have made it five shillings! He said he would be sure to come over again next time I went up to London——"

"But will you be going up to London again?" Cynthia looked down; she spoke in a nervous, questioning tone.

"Certainly not," he said, decidedly. "No, no—the alternative has failed. We must go on—I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. 'The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley.' I saw such a pretty play last night, or rather the tail end of it. After our little talk on the 'phone, I didn't feel I could go straight home to that dreary room in Soho, so I persuaded Rush to make a night of it. We went on somewhere after the theatre and had a very good time."

"Do you mean you haven't been to bed at all?"

"Yes," he said, "I've been up all night, but I'm perfectly fit. You look far worse than I do. You must have gone through a pretty bad ten minutes between those two rings up, eh, Cynthie?"

Then he had known—he had guessed!

"Yes," she said slowly, "I did go through a bad time when we were cut off. But I should have got a message through to you somehow."

"I bet you would"—there was a touch of affectionate admiration in his voice—"I've never known you fail me!" Chris's tone to Cynthia was always that of a

general speaking to a trusted aide-de-camp, and she felt a thrill of pride, of exultation.

There came successive rattlings at the gate—the milkman, the old charwoman, and then the postman. Burdmore jumped up and took from the man's hand the only letter he had brought to Lilywood. It was addressed to Mrs. Burdmore, but Chris tore it open without ceremony.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "the parson's wife over at Boxford wants to make our acquaintance! I met her husband the other day, and thought him a very decent chap—for a parson. Eh? what's this she says?—she fears Louisa may not be well enough to come to her garden-party, but she hopes that we shall both be able to accept." He added, irritably, "What a mania they all seem to have to want to come and see Louisa! Look here, you'd better write at once, and say you'll be pleased to come, and that Louisa isn't well enough to see anybody."

"I shan't go," said Cynthia in a low voice. There had come over her a strange sensation of giddiness and faintness. She sank down into a chair.

"Oh, yes, you will," he said quickly, "and Cynthia—are you attending?"

"Yes." She made a great effort over herself: "What is it?" she asked.

But for a moment he made no reply; he seemed to be thinking, deeply. "On the whole, you'd better get Louisa to write. If she seems in the least anxious to go, allow her to accept for herself, as well as for us. She spoke to me yesterday as if she thought you didn't wish her to see people; now I don't want that notion to get into her head. Even Whitby is surprised we don't have her downstairs now——"

Cynthia looked at him questioningly. He was always the commander, she the lieutenant carrying out—more or less blindly—his orders. From the first he had been determined that Louisa should be seen by as few people as possible, and Cynthia knew well the reason why.

"Cynthia, my dear!" He put his hand, large, white, and scrupulously clean, in spite of the long journey in a workmen's train, on her shoulder, "I'm afraid that the time has come for Louisa to have another attack. It will probably take place on the very morning of this garden-party; so, of course, she won't be able to go to it."

Cynthia Burdmore stood up. The feeling of bewilderment which had come over her a few moments before disappeared; she gathered herself together for a supreme effort.

"Chris—oh, Chris, is that really necessary? I thought we were going to wait until after Mr. Glyn's wedding." She spoke with concentrated energy, but in so low a voice that he could scarcely catch the words, for she was mindful of the charwoman whom they could hear moving noisily about the kitchen.

"Don't be silly!" he whispered roughly—"of course we're going to wait till Glyn's gone away. But we can't have Louisa going out and being met by half the neighbourhood! I wonder that you can't understand that the fewer people see her the better it will be for us—later. Who cares one way or the other about the disappearance of an unknown quantity? You shouldn't have allowed Mrs. Morgan to go upstairs yesterday."

"I couldn't help myself," she said coldly. "It's getting very difficult to keep Louisa upstairs."

"That's the very reason why she must fall ill again!" he exclaimed. "That fool Whitby is persuaded that

he's cured her. We must cure him of that notion." He hesitated, then added in a lower tone: "After all, she needn't have a very bad attack."

"Ah! but it's impossible to regulate that." Her voice also sank.

"It's worth the risk," he said decidedly. "I think we can manage Whitby,"—he turned and looked down into her pale face with a disagreeable smile,—“you know as well as I do that he's devoted to—to *us*, body and soul. He'll be a bit mortified, poor chap. He made so sure he had cured Louisa, didn't he?"

"And must it be on the very day of these people's garden-party? Is that wise, Chris?"

"Yes." He hesitated, thinking the matter over, then—"That will be the best. We shall make every arrangement as if Louisa were really going, and then—well! something will happen! We don't know yet what it will be, we must think that over—but perhaps the fact of the excitement, perhaps a little chill"—Chris shook his head gravely, when in a good humour it amused him to make-believe—"will bring on another"—he broke off speaking abruptly, and, remarkable as was his self-command, there swept over his face an abject look of fear. . . .

Louisa, the woman they had both believed to be safe in bed, was standing on the bottom step of the winding oak staircase. She was wearing a long yellow silk dressing-gown, and Cynthia noted that on the claw-like hand grasping the carved railing glittered several coloured rings.

Miss Burdmore turned away; she began dusting with careful, methodical precision, some blue and white china which stood on a piece of furniture behind her.

"I thought I would surprise you by coming down-

stairs!" Louisa's voice, with its slight nasal intonation, fell with a wonderfully grateful sound on Burdmore's ears. "Your talking woke me up. I'd no idea you were coming back so soon, Chris!" She spoke quite amiably and in the arch voice, with the affected manner she always reserved for her husband—a voice, a manner which generally filled her sister-in-law with shuddering annoyance, but now, as had been the case with Chris, never had sweeter sounds fallen on Cynthia's ears than the few words "poor Louisa" had just uttered.

"And a very delightful surprise it is!" exclaimed Burdmore. He also—even unobservant Peter Whitby had noticed it—adopted a different manner when speaking to his wife. There was in it a touch of rather exaggerated courtesy, a constant undertone of flattery. He now walked forward, and taking the invalid's hand, supported her to a chair, or rather to a curious oak seat, beautiful to look at, but uncomfortable to sit upon.

Cynthia put down the duster. She remained quite silent, still with her back to the two others, watching them closely with the help of a long looking-glass. Chris was right—Louisa no longer looked ill, in fact she looked better than Cynthia had ever seen her. She was a plain, unhealthy-looking woman, but she was evidently well again. Whitby's new drug had indeed worked wonders.

There came over Louisa's face a look of discontent and dissatisfaction. "I don't like this room one bit," she exclaimed fretfully, "I can't think whatever made you take this house, Chris. It must be so horrid having one's meals in the room one lives in, however big it is. If this is a studio, I don't like studios. But then I don't like artists—horrid, lazy fellows! I don't call this cosy at all."

"No, it's an uncomfortable room," said Burdmore sympathetically, "quite unsuited for a convalescent! I don't see why we shouldn't rig up some kind of boudoir for you upstairs, Louisa. I will think it over and see what can be done."

"But we're not going to stay here long, are we, Chris? I suppose you went up yesterday about that practice that sounded so promising?"

"Yes," he said, "if you hadn't come down just now, I was coming up to tell you all about it. From what I can make out, Louisa, it's the very place for us—at Wimbledon, a most beautiful, salubrious spot, with a splendid common. But money will be wanted; even over the preliminary inquiries I've had to spend a good bit of money, Louisa."

A look of annoyance came over Louisa's face. "Everything seems to cost more money than one first sets out to think it would!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid we shan't find it easy to get rid of this place, and I don't wonder at it. Jenny Morgan told me it had been unlet for ever so long before we came here."

"I don't think there'll be any trouble about that," said Burdmore in his loud, confident voice, "and while we are here we may as well make ourselves comfortable. If Cynthia doesn't mind moving to that room across the passage, I might make her bedroom into quite a pretty little sitting-room for you."

"You're always so kind to me, Chris! I never have to explain things to you as I have to other people." Mrs. Burdmore looked angrily in the direction of her pale sister-in-law.

"Let me take you upstairs," said Burdmore, hastily. "Remember it's the first time you've been down, Louisa. I don't think Mr. Whitby meant you to take the law

into your own hands in this way. You ought to have waited till we had prepared the room for you."

The invalid woman stood up. "Yes, you're right, Chris," she said, "I—I do feel weak."

Burdmore rushed forward; he feared she was going to fall. With an instinctive gesture he put his strong right arm round the lanky figure, and half lifted, half carried her across the room and so on to the stairs.

As he slowly disappeared, for Louisa was by no means a light or easy burden, there came over Cynthia's face a strange, almost a terrible look, in which contempt and aversion, not unmixed with amusement, struggled together for mastery.

CHAPTER XVIII

GEORGE GLYN'S long tiring round was at an end, and as he stepped down from his old-fashioned phaeton he could not help remembering that, but for an untoward piece of bad luck, he and Mary would by now have been far from Sunniland, their marriage day well behind them.

While he was walking wearily up the path, his old housekeeper hurried out. She had a note in her hand.

"I promised to give you this the moment you came in, sir," she spoke rather mysteriously. "It came from Lilywood about half an hour ago, and I was to be sure to give it to you and not to Dr. Whitby." She, in common with Mrs. Burdmore, always gave Whitby the honorific title to which he had no official right.

Glyn tore open the note. Anything to do with Lilywood now affected him with a curious feeling of fear and dislike, and that although he was inclined to believe that his former suspicions had been unwarranted.

But what was this? A short, laconic note in the writing he knew to be that of Burdmore. "Dear Glyn,—Cynthia is ill. I wish you would come round yourself for a few moments." He stared down at the paper. Yes, there was the name quite clearly written—Cynthia, not Louisa! Miss Burdmore, as far as he knew, had been perfectly well the night before. He had not seen her himself, but he knew that Jenny

and Whitby had called at Lilywood and that Cynthia had entertained them.

How strange, too—it really did seem very strange—that Burdmore should have sent this note to be given into his own hands! It was Whitby who had now become the intimate of the house, who actually had charge of Mrs. Burdmore; it would have been more reasonable to have asked Whitby to go in and see what was the matter with Miss Burdmore.

However, in such a case a doctor has very little choice as to what he is to do. Glyn thrust the note into his pocket, and, without going into his house, turned on his heel and walked up the road, quickly.

There was none of the usual delay at the gate of Lilywood; the old charwoman was obviously on the look-out for him.

“Miss Burdmore’s really bad, sir,” she said, “and I’m staying on a bit to oblige them. The master only came home this morning, and he’s terrible put about. I will say that for him—he’s a kind brother as well as a kind husband.”

“What’s the matter with Miss Burdmore?” asked Glyn, briefly.

“That’s just what Mr. Burdmore and I can’t make out,” said Mrs. Muxlow. “She’s as white as a corpse—and she says she’s a funny feeling in her head, and she’s been crying and going on awful. I think one minute her brother was afraid she was going to have a fit, but she’s too young for anything of that sort,” she ended, confidently.

“And how is Mrs. Burdmore?” Glyn could not resist the question.

A smile came over the old countrywoman’s face.

“Well, as you might expect, the mistress’s nose is

out of joint—you know, doctor. I look after her as well as I can, but I'm not Miss Cynthia. But there," Mrs. Muxlow lowered her voice, "Mrs. Burdmore's not what I call a lady, sir; she doesn't care how much she runs a body off her legs!"

"Is Miss Burdmore upstairs?" asked Glyn.

"Yes, we got her upstairs. It's funny, too—she was all right this morning. She even got the master's breakfast ready for him when he came home early."

It was only a quarter of an hour later, but in that quarter of an hour Glyn's feelings towards these two people, Chris and Cynthia Burdmore, had undergone a certain change. He had been moved and surprised more than he would have cared to admit by Burdmore's unaffected anxiety and distress. Chris had looked miserable, horror-stricken, as he had stood by the bed on which Cynthia Burdmore lay, calm now and even faintly smiling, but with that strange pallor which to a doctor spells shock.

Burdmore had always seemed extremely concerned during those sharp attacks of his wife's which had so puzzled George Glyn. But, even before he had felt any suspicion as to the real cause of Mrs. Burdmore's mysterious illness, it had seemed to the medical man that the husband's anxiety was to a certain extent simulated. Now, as they stood together in the studio, there could be no mistake as to Burdmore's keen distress.

In his suspense he even grasped George Glyn's hand with a convulsive movement.

"What is it? For God's sake tell me what you think it is, Glyn."

"I've no doubt as to what it is. Your sister is

suffering from shock. Something must have happened—something perhaps she hasn't told you—which has given her a terrible fright. Did anything happen last night?" Glyn looked fixedly at the other man. "You were in town. Is it possible that anyone tried to break in? I know Miss Burdmore was afraid of something of the kind, for she told Mrs. Morgan so."

"No," said Burdmore, hesitatingly, "I'm quite sure nothing of the kind happened. She was all right till about two hours ago. But you know Cynthia keeps her own counsel."

Glyn nodded his head gravely. He had always known that. "Then don't ask her," he said quickly, "it would only upset her. She ought to be kept as quiet as possible. I shouldn't be surprised if in two or three days she were practically well again, though of course the real effects won't pass away so soon as that."

"When will you come again?" said Burdmore.

Glyn could not help contrasting the speaker's anxiety and depression of manner with the perfunctory concern he had shown on the occasion of his wife's illnesses. Something of what was in the doctor's mind may have shown it in his face.

"You see, I'm so used to Louisa's being ill," he said, apologetically, "but Cynthia's always well. It is she who has been my nurse—my guardian angel——" his voice broke; Glyn looked at him astonished.

"I will look in again this evening," he said, kindly, "I suppose you would rather I went on attending your sister?"

"Yes—yes—of course! Whitby's a very nice young fellow, but, after all, he's not your experience. If you had been away, I should have got that man over from Boxford."

"Whitby's cleverer than you give him credit for," said Glyn. He added, "Surely, you've been content with the way he has treated Mrs. Burdmore?"

An embarrassed look came over Burdmore's face.

"Why shouldn't I speak frankly?" he said. "The simple truth is, Glyn, my wife didn't care for you, and she's got fond of Whitby." He spoke confusedly, impatiently, as if the matter were of little or no moment. "Besides, Cynthia herself didn't want Whitby called in."

As soon as Glyn got home, Miss Burdmore's mysterious and utterly unexpected seizure—it could hardly be called illness—was to a certain extent satisfactorily accounted for by a few words said to him by Whitby. To the elder doctor's relief and surprise, his friend did not seem annoyed that he, Glyn, had been sent for to attend Cynthia.

"I'm very glad Burdmore did send for you," he said. "I've got to know her so well that really it's much better you should attend her. Besides, it proves that what I've always told you is true—Burdmore *does* think well of you. I don't think you've any cause to regret 'poor Louisa's' preference for me!"

Glyn smiled a little. "Lilywood seems destined to give me trouble," he said; "I confess Mrs. Burdmore's case completely stumped me, and now here's Miss Burdmore obviously suffering from shock and pretending that nothing has happened to upset her!"

"I think I can clear up that mystery." Whitby spoke very deliberately. "She's excitable and nervous, in spite of that quiet manner, and she received a letter by the second post yesterday the contents of which it was evidently of the highest importance to communicate to her brother. I was there when it happened."

"Do you mean when the letter came?" asked Glyn.

"No! no!" Whitby spoke impatiently. "I gather he arranged that he should telephone to her, and by some accident—you know the sort of thing that's always happening here—they got cut off. She was most awfully upset! I thought for a moment she was going to faint! I promised to get a wire off for her—but just then he got through to her again! Between ourselves, I expect Chris Burdmore is no end of an ass."

"I don't agree," said Glyn gravely. "I'm sure Burdmore, under all that talk and bounce, is a clever man, and a man who always knows exactly the impression he desires to produce."

Whitby shook his head. Glyn's view of their neighbour was utterly opposed to his own, and he thought himself in a far better position to judge owing to the simple fact that he constantly saw—so he assured himself—Chris Burdmore off his guard, lazing about, chatting by the hour to his wife, letting all the real responsibilities of the little household weigh heavily on his sister.

Then Whitby felt rather ashamed of having criticised Burdmore. He ought to like the man more than he did. "He's awfully good to his wife!" he exclaimed. "Most men married to such a woman would feel their life a hell, I'm sure *I* should, but Burdmore's honestly fond of her."

"Do you really think so?" asked Glyn, and something in his friend's tone pulled Whitby up sharp.

"Well, yes, I do, Glyn," the banter dropped out of his voice. "I'm there a good bit, as you know, and there's no doubt, no possible doubt, that Burdmore is

on the best of terms with that disagreeable woman. He always takes her part against his sister."

"Of course they're all living on her income," mused Glyn.

"Yes, but that doesn't necessarily make a man nice to his wife. No, no, Glyn, you're prejudiced against the Burdmores!"

CHAPTER XIX

IN every household there is generally one person on whom all the others unconsciously depend ; and, in spite of the ironical saying which declares no one to be indispensable, the withdrawal, for even a short time, of that person from the sphere of his or her activities is apt to bring about a great change.

The illness, if it could be called an illness, of Cynthia Burdmore made a serious difference at Lilywood, and aroused much sympathy among those who had become acquainted with the brother and sister. That Miss Burdmore was ailing became known through a circumstance much to Chris Burdmore's credit, for Cynthia's brother gallantly rose to the occasion and did his best to supply her place.

During the days that followed her mysterious seizure, he refused all invitations, and devoted himself entirely to the care of his invalid sister and of his convalescent wife—whom, by the way, he invariably described to those who had not the pleasure of Mrs. Burdmore's acquaintance as "my missis." His energy, his good nature, and his good temper were indefatigable, and Peter Whitby, who had at once constituted himself Chris Burdmore's helper and auxiliary in his task of waiting on the two ladies, was amused and rather touched at the pains the husband of the one and the brother of the other took to keep them apart.

Mrs. Burdmore seemed to regard it as a personal

affront that Cynthia should be even more ailing than she was herself. She grudged every moment her husband spent with his sister, and even Jenny Morgan, who also came and went a good deal to Lilywood during the few days during which Cynthia was really incapacitated, was pained and surprised at "poor Louisa's" selfishness.

Mrs. Burdmore was practically well again, but she refused to throw off her invalid habits, and her husband weakly allowed her to continue them. She was however eager to make the acquaintance of the neighbours of whom Chris Burdmore talked so much, and who had shown so kind an interest in her illness, and much to her satisfaction, Mrs. Morgan offered to drive her to the garden-party about to be given at Boxford Rectory.

The clergyman's wife had herself called at Lilywood early one afternoon. Chris had gone out to the carriage to make his wife's excuses for not being down to receive her; Cynthia, lying stretched out on a deck chair on the balcony, had heard the conversation, and, being for the moment alone, had smiled a strange, bitter smile. She was not going to the garden-party, for, though she was gradually getting better, any exertion tired her, and then it was obvious that Louisa would much prefer to go alone with Chris.

During those long hot summer days, George Glyn, whose faithful heart was so completely Mary Morgan's, yet became curiously interested in Cynthia Burdmore. During his morning call he saw her alone—for Whitby never came to Lilywood till Glyn had come and gone—lying down on the balcony, never writing or reading, her needlework ready to her hand, but left aside.

She seemed always glad to see him, but she never made to him any of those confidences of which doctors are so

often the recipients, and Glyn was sure that there was still something on her mind, something she could not forget, for her eyes were never free from the watchful, anxious look which, to a medical man, always tells a tale of mental unease.

George Glyn knew more of human nature, and of its strange twists, temptations, and recoveries from evil, than even his intimates would have thought in any way possible for so quiet and, apparently, unimaginative a man. And now, from the secret recesses of his mind and memory, came the question as to whether Cynthia had suddenly discovered in her brother a sinister intent of which before she had had no suspicion. Looking back, Glyn thought he had detected remorse as well as natural affection prompting Chris Burdmore's agitation and distress on the morning Cynthia had been taken so suddenly, so inexplicably, ill.

But to Peter Whitby George Glyn said no word of his theories and suspicions. Miss Burdmore was now his patient, and it was no part of his duty to discuss her case, mental or physical, with any one else. And then—then Whitby's relation to the brother and sister was so intimate, in Glyn's eyes so peculiar! The younger man had become their friend, their advocate through thick and thin; in a more normal place than Sunniland his intimacy with Lilywood would have aroused a great deal of comment and chaffing remark. What would happen when he took over Glyn's work, the cares of a large straggling country practice? Whitby would not then be able to spend the greater part of each day at Lilywood.

George Glyn sometimes wondered if Miss Burdmore really desired Whitby's constant presence. Once, when he himself had stayed rather longer than usual,

there had come the familiar rattle at the gate, and the usual shout from Whitby, and Cynthia had frowned,—nay, more, she had looked up in Glyn's face, and had whispered, "Why don't you find Mr. Whitby something to do? It can't be a good thing for him to be so idle,—" but a moment later she greeted the young man with one of the bright sweet smiles which she rarely lavished on Glyn himself, and he had left Lilywood discomfited, dissatisfied.

As for Whitby, he never had a doubt but that he was welcome, and very welcome, at Lilywood. To himself he seemed to have slipped with Cynthia ill into a far greater and truer intimacy than with Cynthia well, and slightly, or so it had sometimes seemed to him, on the defensive. His daily presence had become a matter of course, accepted with greatful equanimity by Burdmore, and with gracious satisfaction by Mrs. Burdmore, who apparently considered that his constant visits were a special compliment to herself.

He did not ask himself whither he was drifting; he lived wholly from day to day, the sight of Cynthia disabled and suffering, stirring him unconsciously to deeper devotion and to an increased desire to rescue her from the life she had been leading ever since he had known her,—that of constant thought for her idle brother's material comfort, and of incessant attendance on her selfish sister-in-law.

It was the day before the garden-party. The two were sitting together out of doors, Miss Burdmore for the first time looking as if able to take up her daily round of duties; and, rather suddenly, Whitby told her of his scheme for getting Mrs. Burdmore away.

"She isn't really well," he said, "and anything might start her off again. Of course she's set 'her

heart on this garden-party; and then your illness was an excellent thing for her; it stirred her up, and made her feel she wasn't the only woman in the world!"

"I've lately had a feeling that Louisa would soon have another of her queer attacks"—Cynthia was bending over the fine needlework which she had taken up again the last two days, but Whitby saw that her face flushed.

"Oh, no," he said, decidedly, "that's most unlikely; in fact, I should say impossible, if it wasn't that one really can't tell with that sort of case what the patient mayn't provoke by sheer imagination!"

"You see, it happened before at Southampton. Louisa was quite well then, and going out and about."

"Still, from what Glyn tells me, her attacks were of a very definite character. Unless she has been playing tricks with her diet, I don't think there's any likelihood of a recurrence——"

"I don't know what she has been taking lately," said Cynthia, a little uneasily, "for Chris has been seeing to it all. But that reminds me that I ought to take a tray up to her now."

"I'll take it—of course!"

"Well, let me get it ready first."

Miss Burdmore went into the little kitchen and lit the gas. Whitby, left in the studio, could hear her moving about, feebly, languidly.

At last she came out. He took the tray from her. "You know she oughtn't to have these sort of little meals," he said, half jokingly, then lifted the cover off the jug, "Why, what on earth is this?" he exclaimed.

"Don't you know? I thought everyone took it in London. It's called Bortch, a Russian soup. Louisa's

very fond of it. Of course we don't make it here. Chris ordered it when he was sending for some other tinned and bottled foods."

"I wish Mrs. Burdmore didn't like these sort of things!" the doctor in Whitby spoke, and that vigorously.

"I'm very glad she does!" Cynthia was smiling, a wan smile. "If she didn't like what you call these *things*, I should have to spend most of my time cooking."

Whitby set the tray half on the sideboard, and again lifted the lid of the jug. "Pah!" he exclaimed, "how horrid it looks! Just like——" He stopped short.

Cynthia nodded her head. "Yes, just like blood," she said, and then turned very pale.

"Go and lie down," he exclaimed. "I'll see to her—you're not fit to worry about her, Miss Burdmore. She's in much better case than you are just now!"

As he went upstairs, treading heavily, as does a man bearing an awkward and unaccustomed burden, Miss Burdmore pressed her hot hands to her face. At that moment she would far rather have faced death than play the part which fell to her in the sinister comedy of which the next day was to see another act.

CHAPTER XX

“WELL—? What do you make of the case now?”

George Glyn looked hard at his colleague and friend. It was nearly six o'clock in the morning, and though the sun was beating down heavily on the white road along which they were walking there was an invigorating freshness and crispness in the air.

They had just left Lilywood after what had been an exhausting and, to at least one of the two doctors, a terrible hour with Mrs. Burdmore. Both men looked very tired, Glyn grey with fatigue. He longed to be alone; all his doubts, all his half-formed suspicions, were again hot upon him, and the thought of what it might be his duty to do weighed with an awful pressure on his conscience.

He had asked Peter Whitby his pregnant question just as the two had turned out of the gate, and there was to the speaker something terribly significant in the look he cast at the younger man. How amazing that not the faintest suspicion of what seemed to him so clear penetrated the other's brain! Peter Whitby looked more discomfited than puzzled, and for a moment he made no answer to Glyn's question.

Then suddenly he stopped walking, and with an impatient movement, “I'm not in a fit state to tell you what I think!” he exclaimed. A moment later, as if wishing to soften the effect of his words, he tried to smile. “Forgive me, old man, I ought not to have

said that. I know it's just as bad for you as it is for me—except—well, I did think I'd conquered poor Mrs. Burdmore's trouble. I suppose you always suspected that I'd done nothing of the sort, eh? I could see you weren't exactly surprised this morning; you always thought she would have another of these attacks." He repeated, "You never really believed that my treatment was doing her any good, did you?" His look challenged Glyn to tell at least a measure of the truth.

"You're wrong there, Whitby. I admitted—anyone would have admitted—the remarkable improvement that occurred in Mrs. Burdmore after you took her in hand. I confess I did think it likely that she would have another attack before you had done with her—but I didn't think it would happen *now*. I had a notion—though what has just taken place shows that I was quite wrong—that she wouldn't fall ill again till after I had left Sunniland—I mean after my marriage."

"What an extraordinary idea!" exclaimed Whitby. "Why surely every day she kept well ought to have made such a relapse the more improbable, but of course I've not seen so much of this kind of thing as you have."

They walked on in silence. Whitby was telling himself that the life of a general practitioner in the country is a dog's life! The evening before he had been looking forward so eagerly to to-day. Everyone else had been going to the garden-party but himself and Cynthia Burdmore, and they would have had a long, peaceful afternoon alone—alone as they never had a chance of being.

Now, so he told himself with wrathful discontent, poor Cynthia would slip back into the position of nurse to her ailing sister-in-law. It was too hard—too unfair! A glance at Glyn's set, tired face caused the

young man's mind to be filled with a swift retrospect. He heard once more the shouts outside Rosedene which had wakened him that morning; again there sounded in his ears the loud rapping on the glass door of the verandah which had heralded Burdmore's presence. The husband's extreme agitation and distress had been moving. "Come—come at once, I'm afraid Louisa is dying!" he had exclaimed with incoherent fear, and both doctors, losing not a moment, had huddled on their clothes, and at breathless speed had hastened to Lilywood.

Whitby recalled with a thrill what a comfort it had been to find Cynthia Burdmore composed, silent, gentle as she always was, and engaged in alleviating, as far as was possible, poor Louisa's awful paroxysms of pain. Cynthia of course also felt horror and pity, but, unlike her brother, she was able to control her feelings, and to show the compassionate intelligence, the mental quickness of a highly-trained nurse; in fact, she had so arranged matters that he, Whitby, and George Glyn had found everything ready to their hand that they would be likely to require.

The sight of his wife's suffering had quite unmanned Chris Burdmore, and so from the first he had been only in the way. Very soon Glyn had had to beg him gently but firmly to leave the sufferer's room; after a few muttered protests he had obeyed, taking refuge in the little wood, out of hearing of his wife's stifled groans. Whitby had felt deeply sorry for him; nay, more, even in the midst of his own agitation and discomfiture—for the young doctor was very keenly distressed by Mrs. Burdmore's relapse into serious illness—Whitby had found time to tell himself that, however shallow and selfish Christopher Burdmore

might appear when contrasted with his sister, there could be no doubt as to his devotion to the poor woman whom most men would have felt so intolerable a drag and burden.

Peter Whitby, during that short silent walk back to Rosedene, remembered yet another thing. Towards the end of their long exhausting hour at Lilywood, when Mrs. Burdmore had become a little easier, Glyn had suggested that Miss Burdmore should lie down for a quarter of an hour, if only to take a few moments' rest and peace before she was left wholly in charge of the patient. Oddly enough, Cynthia had refused, very quietly but very decidedly. Between herself and George Glyn had come a short, almost silent, tussle of wills—Miss Burdmore had conquered, and Whitby admired retrospectively her strength of character.

Another fact was very present to the younger doctor. He had been inclined to disbelieve in the seriousness of the attacks of which he had heard what he had believed to be an absurdly exaggerated account from Mrs. Burdmore herself. Now that he had actually seen the unfortunate woman in the throes, he wondered that those about her had not made more of them. All his half-laughing contempt of "poor Louisa" had vanished. She had shown great courage, a kind of stoicism, a strange, fatalistic resignation during that dreadful hour; he had, of course, come across the same thing in his hospital work, but it had astonished him to meet it here, in a woman whom he had thought, nay, whom he knew to be, so hopelessly selfish and spoilt.

As Glyn opened the gate of Rosedene, something in his weary, anxious face made Whitby speak: "You've been right all along, and I've been quite wrong!" he exclaimed impulsively.

"You had no *data* to go upon," Glyn replied heavily. He was terribly depressed and anxious, and yet, gazing into the other's ingenuous face, he felt it impossible to say, at any rate here and now, what he suspected, nay what he was now inclined to feel he *knew*.

"Seeing how much better she became after I took her in hand," Whitby went on, naively, "I told myself that it could not possibly be what I understood you thought. Ulceration can't come and go like that!"

"No, and whatever I thought when she had her first attack," said Glyn, "I very soon changed my opinion."

"But what do you think now?"

The question was a very natural one, and yet Glyn hesitated. "I don't know what to think," he said at last.

They were standing in the path, their voices lowered, for the windows of Rosedene were wide open. Glyn did not wish his housekeeper to overhear what they were saying.

"If only we knew more about Mrs. Burdmore," Whitby spoke meditatively. He would have given much to have had his father there, or any one of those great London doctors who are famed for accurate diagnosis. "I refer, of course, to her medical history. When I took her case over I did try to pump Burdmore, but he grew rather restless, and he was curiously uncommunicative. He confessed that as regarded her illness he had had several theories, but it was pretty clear what he really thought. He told me quite frankly that when she was taken out of herself she got quite well. Of course, I've not had much experience of—that type of woman; but I know that some of our hospital cases are capable of almost any amount of

malingering if they want to produce a certain impression. Why, I've known them take in the nurses! According to my father, smart ladies are almost as bad."

"Mrs. Burdmore was not malingering this morning." Glyn spoke with sudden sharp irritation. It seemed to him that every one round the poor woman, even including Peter Whitby, was in a conspiracy to belittle her. "I blame myself, Whitby, very much for not having made it clearer to you what her attacks were like. I don't even remember if I told you—we've seen so little of one another lately, and you seemed from the beginning to be going on so well with the case—that I begged Burdmore very early in the day, to let me have another opinion. I was most anxious to get Locke over from Horsham. It would have been a great satisfaction to me to have known what he thought. Burdmore seemed quite willing—and then to my astonishment I found that he had actually spoken to his wife and that she was quite set against it! I felt very much annoyed; he ought to be enough of a doctor to know that he shouldn't have said anything to her—why, it could have been managed so easily."

"Of course she's a very difficult woman to manage," said Whitby quickly. "It's true she's devoted to her husband, but he doesn't seem to have much influence over her. She's evidently a person who's always had her own way, and she never shows the slightest consideration for the feelings and wishes of her sister-in-law."

Glyn made no immediate answer. Was it possible that Whitby was so blinded by his liking for Miss Burdmore as not to see how deep was the antagonism between the two women?

"I don't," he said, suddenly. "if we could get some member of Mrs. Burdmore's family to come and help at Lilywood. She must have relations of sorts, though I've never heard her mention them."

"Oddly enough," said Whitby, "the poor woman has no close relations: those she has are very distant, and she's quarrelled with them all. She told me this herself the second time I saw her. I think, knowing her, one would expect such a state of things!" For the first time that morning Peter Whitby smiled. "She told me she hated her few relations, apparently because they all tried to borrow money from her. If she treated them as she habitually treats Miss Burdmore one can understand their not being at all anxious to keep up with her. No, no, Glyn! What is wanted at Lilywood just now is an ordinary trained nurse. Next time I see Burdmore I shall try and make him consent to my sending for one. In fact I'm thinking of wiring for a nurse after we've had breakfast—and that without first asking leave."

"I shouldn't do that if I were you," Glyn spoke very quietly. He put out his hand and laid it on the other's arm, then continued speaking in a very low voice: "To tell you the truth, I *did* send for a nurse after Mrs. Burdmore's second attack. In fact I did exactly what you now suggest that you would like to do. I suspected—wrongly as I now believe—internal ulceration, and of course I thought the case ought to be watched very closely."

"Well, what happened? Not that you need tell me—I can guess that Mrs. Burdmore entirely refused to have a nurse—eh? Well, I'm not surprised!"

Again Glyn felt that Whitby's prejudice against their patient was cruel and unreasonable.

"Nothing of the kind!" he said sharply. "Mrs. Burdmore never saw the nurse; both Burdmore and his sister absolutely refused to allow the woman to go upstairs. They were quite nice about it—but quite firm. Burdmore insisted on paying her fee for the whole week, though it was in no sense necessary. She wasn't there an hour."

"And why did you never tell me this before?" asked Whitby, who felt more surprised at Glyn's silence concerning this matter than at the brother's and sister's refusal of the trained nurse's services.

"Because they both of them begged me earnestly to say nothing about it to any one. They seemed nervously afraid lest Mrs. Burdmore should hear of what I had done, and they declared that if she did hear of it, she would probably refuse to see me again! At the time," he concluded, half to himself, "I believed them. Shall we go into the house? I don't know how you feel, Whitby, but I'm longing for a cup of tea. Shall I tell Mrs. Bain to bring two cups of tea at once into my study? For my part I'd rather not wait while she gets breakfast ready."

Whitby nodded his head. As he followed Glyn into the small consulting-room he asked rather eagerly, "How many attacks of this kind has she had—I mean altogether?"

Glyn waited till the housekeeper had brought in the two cups of tea and had gone out, closing the door behind her. Then he threw himself into a chair with a weary gesture and repeated Whitby's question—"How many attacks? I've got every detail down in my case-book, and perhaps I ought to have read them to you when you took Mrs. Burdmore over. But it all happened, as you know, in a moment, that day I went

at to town, and of course I saw you had formed your own opinion. Mark you, the earlier attacks were nothing like as bad as this."

"Would you mind reading me your notes now?" asked Whitby, diffidently. That hour spent in Mrs. Burdmore's room at Lilywood had somehow altered his opinion of George Glyn. Glyn had been so collected and calm, so reassuring and kind; it was to him that Cynthia had looked for her orders. Whitby was thankful indeed that Glyn had been there to share, nay, to assume, all the responsibility.

CHAPTER XXI

GLYN pushed aside his empty cup with a quick, nervous movement. He turned his chair round, and brought from a shelf just behind him the large, heavy manuscript book in which he kept the elaborate records of each of his cases. However tired George Glyn might be, he never went to bed without writing up his medical diary.

Peter Whitby looked at the book with a curious sensation. He remembered with what hidden amusement he had acceded to Glyn's request that when he took over the practice he would keep up to date all these elaborate notes, and that even if the poorer patients he was called upon to attend had but trivial ailments. He was glad now that Glyn was so methodical and conscientious. He realized how valuable would be any observations actually jotted down day by day during Mrs. Burdmore's former attacks of illness at Lilywood.

Slowly, and, as even an indifferent observer might have thought, reluctantly, Glyn unlocked the clasp which safely hid the contents of the book from prying eyes with the key he always carried on his watch-chain. Then, after consulting the index at some length, he opened the book out widely, and began turning over the leaves.

Now greatly as Whitby liked and respected Glyn, and though his feelings concerning this very case-book

before them had undergone a great change, the other doctor's slow, deliberate manner irritated him; and while Glyn was apparently trying to find the entry in question by running his finger down the notes neatly inscribed on each page, the younger man got up and walked about the room. "Can't you find it?" he asked at length. "I thought you had such a good index."

Glyn opened the book in quite another place to that where he had been apparently seeking. "Yes," he said, hurriedly, "of course I can find it if you'll give me a minute. Here it is!"

Whitby drew near; he walked round the table and leant down over Glyn's shoulder. He wanted to see for himself what was written there, curious to know without delay in what technical terms Glyn had described Mrs. Burdmore's illness when she had first become his patient.

But suddenly there occurred a most extraordinary and untoward thing—Glyn's small, delicately fashioned hand shot up from under the table where it had been lying on his knee, and covered up a long entry on the page at which the volume now lay open. "Whitby!" he exclaimed, "don't be offended, but I'd rather you didn't see the whole of my notes on Mrs. Burdmore's case,—at least, not now, not yet. Of course I'm prepared to read you anything that's essential to your understanding of what happened on each of the occasions when I was first called in to see her. But that is all I wish you to see now."

Whitby fell back. He walked again round the table and stood opposite, looking down into Glyn's troubled face. "I—I beg your pardon," he said, stiffly, "I suppose it was rather indiscreet of me to do that. Of

course it never occurred to me that you would feel the slightest objection to my seeing the entries."

Glyn's hand, no doubt unconsciously, was still resting on the open page. "Look here, Whitby—" he hesitated, then said with peculiar gravity, "I want you to take my word for it that I've a very special reason for not showing you all that's written down here. As far as I'm concerned this is more than a case-book. It's—it's almost a private diary as well. I jot down any theories I may have formed, and they are often wildly wrong. Now with regard to this very case of Mrs. Burdmore, you yourself, at any rate in the past, made me feel that I had been hopelessly out in my—shall I say diagnosis?—of what ailed Mrs. Burdmore. You must give me time, Whitby—time to make up my mind what I ought to say—for I don't want to say anything of which I might be very sorry afterwards. I'm not in the same position I was in six months ago; I'm going to be married."

He spoke in a confused, odd way, very unlike his usual direct, simple speech, and Whitby, at once surprised and a little amused, felt his anger fall away from him. There came to him a perception which belongs to age rather than youth, namely that after all human beings know very little of each other's secret thoughts and hidden idiosyncrasies. To have to admit himself wholly in the wrong was evidently more than George Glyn—good old George, whom he had thought so humble-minded, so straightforward in his view of his profession and of life—could stand, and this was, if absurd, all the same rather touching now that he was going to be married.

"All right," he said, good-humouredly, "don't say anything more about it. If you did make a mistake—

and that's by no means proved—I'm not at all surprised you did. I've never come across such a puzzling case. I wish we had my father here. I don't want to be unfeeling, but I have a sort of suspicion that he'd make short work of Mrs. Burdmore. Of course I admit that she was not malingering this morning, but—" he looked round to see that the door was quite closed—"I wonder if it occurred to you to-day that she might have taken some form of irritant? She was very angry only yesterday because Miss Burdmore told her how much better she was looking, in fact that she looked quite well again!"

Glyn bent down over the book. He was full of painful indecision. Here in a sense had at last come a straight lead, but the words Whitby had just uttered showed how completely unsuspecting he was of what the other suspected might be the hideous truth.

"You must remember," Whitby went on, eagerly, "that it would be impossible for her to know what might be the exact effect of anything she took. I only throw out this as a vague suggestion. I may be doing the poor soul a very cruel injustice."

Glyn looked up. "I have sometimes suspected," he said, deliberately, "that something of the kind may be being administered to her——" then waited in something like sick suspense for the reply.

But he was destined to be at once relieved and greatly disappointed by Whitby's quick answer: "Why haven't you told Miss Burdmore of your suspicion? But perhaps you have?"

"I did not feel justified in doing that," muttered Glyn.

"No, I can understand that; and—and I confess, Glyn, that it seems to me most improbable. Though

I have heard of a case where a woman—educated, refined, and all the rest of it—swallowed a packet of needles to make herself interesting to a man whose love she thought she'd lost."

"Let me tell you quite shortly what happened when the Burdmores first came to Lilywood." Glyn looked down at the page: "I see that the first of her attacks took place on the 17th of May. This was almost immediately after their arrival in the place, and that attack was very bad—not so bad as the one this morning, but still quite enough to alarm me very much. In fact I don't mind admitting to you that at first I took it to be a ptomaine case, the more so that Miss Burdmore was also far from well on that occasion."

Peter Whitby smiled a superior little smile.

"However, I soon saw that it was not that," continued Glyn, hastily. "She got better remarkably quickly, and then came the second attack, not so bad, or anywhere near so bad, as the first had been. It was on that occasion, you will remember, that I sent for the nurse. Again she got better, but still there came slight recurrences of the old trouble, and she fell into hopeless invalid ways and spent most of her time in bed. I was very much puzzled."

He waited a moment, and then added, in a rather singular tone, "You really like the Burdmores, don't you, Whitby? I mean you've formed a good opinion of both the brother and the sister? On the whole they impress you *quite* favourably?"

Whitby hesitated, and grew very red. "I don't like Christopher Burdmore as much as I did," he answered, frankly, "and yet I feel a brute for saying so, for as you know he's very decent to me, and of course I felt awfully sorry for the poor fellow this morning. But,

after all, he's an able-bodied man, and it seems to me he might do something more than hang about Sunniland paying calls and making himself useful in every house but his own! I admit he's been better lately, I mean since Miss Burdmore herself was ill. But he really *is* a selfish beggar."

"And you regard him as being on perfectly good terms with his wife?" Glyn had taken up the paper-knife and was balancing it on his fingers.

"Why of course I do!" Whitby stared at Glyn as if he could hardly believe the other had spoken the words to which he was now making answer. "Burdmore's extraordinarily good to his wife, and that though she's an awfully trying woman. Why, think of the state he was in just now!"

"That doesn't mean much," said Glyn shortly, "that's a mere matter of nerves."

"Look here, Glyn"—Whitby spoke very decidedly, "believe me you're going on a wrong tack. Mrs. Burdmore's no reason to be dissatisfied with life. In fact I've often thought that her devotion to Burdmore was rather pathetic, considering what a very disagreeable woman she is. She really makes an effort to be pleasant when he's there; but of course I admit she's an intense dislike of her sister-in-law, in fact her hatred of Miss Burdmore is quite abnormal. The way she goes on has made me understand as I never did before what a trained nurse has sometimes to go through."

"Then why does Miss Burdmore live with them?" asked Glyn. "If Mrs. Burdmore's as well off as we're given to understand, she could have a companion, to say nothing of a proper servant."

"No companion, no servant would endure what poor Cyn—Miss Burdmore has to go through." Whitby

spoke with a passion of suppressed feeling. "And it's quite clear to me why she's here. When Mrs. Burdmore fell ill—which she seems to have done, by the way, at Southampton—Burdmore sent for his sister at once. It's obvious he can't do without her; he's evidently been used to turn to her in any kind of trouble."

"I suppose you've no idea how long the Burdmores have been married."

"None at all. Some time before the Flood, I should think."

"Eh?" said Glyn, puzzled.

"I beg your pardon. It's one of our home expressions for something which happened a long time ago. I oughtn't to have used it in this connexion, still"—his eyes were twinkling, "it's difficult to imagine Mrs. Burdmore a bride!"

But there was no answering smile on Glyn's face. He looked stern and pre-occupied. He shut his case-book, locked the clasp, and put it away; then got up and came close up to Whitby: "It's nearly time for breakfast," he said; then added, a little awkwardly, "I wonder if you would mind my going on with Mrs. Burdmore—I mean between now and my wedding day? I feel seriously distressed about her, Whitby, and I wish I could get your father to run down to see her; that would be a tremendous relief to me!"

Whitby stared at Glyn in some perplexity. Of course this morning's business had been mortifying—mortifying to him, Whitby, that is—but there was certainly no reason why Glyn should take it like this—in fact it was absurd. Whitby asked himself with some contempt what poor Glyn would do if he were dealing with a *really* difficult case,—one of those cases which strain every mental and physical nerve in the

doctor who feels that life or death, humanly speaking, depend on his making a right or wrong judgment. Of course the young man himself would have been very glad if he could have spirited his father to Lilywood for ten minutes that morning, but as for seriously asking that same busy, overworked father to come down from town to see what he would probably at once diagnose as a case of rather abnormal hysteria, why the notion was preposterous!

"Of course I'd like father to see her," he said, hesitating, "but you see this is his busiest time of year—so many of his country patients are still in town. But if you wish it I'll write to him a full account of the case, and ask him what we'd better do. He was awfully keen about my taking over the job for you; he thought it would give me a glimpse of private practice—and so it has," he concluded, ruefully.

"What I feel," exclaimed Glyn, going on as if he had not heard of the other's proposal, "is that I should like to share my responsibility with some man who is older, more experienced—of course I mean some one of a different standing from us both. She's stronger now, but that first time I really thought she was going to slip between my fingers!"

"There was no fear of that to-day," said Whitby, quickly.

"No, no! I admit that! But still she's not fit to go through much more of this sort of thing."

"Let's hope she won't," said Whitby, yawning—he was tired of the discussion and sleepy.

CHAPTER XXII

To a man suffering from any form of acute anxiety and suspense, or even from amazement at some untoward circumstance which has taken him completely by surprise, there is something strange and unnatural in the fact that the world about him goes on just the same as it did before the event occurred which has so altered the whole of life for himself. This feeling was strong upon George Glyn during the rest of the long day which had begun so inauspiciously at Lilywood.

In the course of his conversation with Peter Whitby a very disagreeable suspicion had crossed Glyn's mind, and during his morning round, while he was driving through the scattered Surrey villages, listening with apparently attentive and kindly ear to the long-winded confidences of his many patients—for he had won the respect and confidence of the whole neighbourhood—small happenings to which he had not paid much attention at the time came back to him, and seemed to confirm his new and most unwelcome theory as to Whitby's relations to Lilywood.

With frowning brow and mind now attuned to acute anxiety, Glyn tried to remember the attitude of Whitby and Cynthia to one another; but memory told him nothing. He had not often been at Lilywood with his friend, and when Whitby had been there Christopher Burdmore's showy personality had overshadowed him.

But Glyn now remembered with disagreeable dis-

tinctness the manner and the tone with which the other had uttered the few words that same morning concerning Miss Burdmore and her devoted attendance on her sick sister-in-law. There had been deep feeling, nay, a passion of protest in his voice, when he had described the way in which Cynthia was being used by her brother to wait on the ill-tempered and exacting invalid.

Glyn told himself with a sinking heart that if Peter Whitby had fallen in love with Miss Burdmore then the situation became at once doubly complicated. Not only would it be difficult, perhaps impossible, to convince Whitby that any foul play was going on, but, what to the older doctor was even more to the purpose, it would make Whitby blind, deaf, unsuspecting of even the plainest facts, once George Glyn and his bride were safely away from Sunniland.

George Glyn did not jump to these conclusions with the quickness and certainty that a cleverer, more self-confident man might have done. He came to them slowly, painfully, keeping his mind open, and ever considering, as a different type of human being would not have done, that there was a chance—the one chance in a hundred that is so apt to come across a doctor in the course of his practice—that he might after all be wrong. Of course it was possible, though to himself most improbable, that Mrs. Burdmore's strange alternatives of health and illness might be natural, or, at the worst, provoked in some way by herself.

When passing Lilywood on his way home he threw the reins to his man and suddenly leapt down. Mrs. Burdmore had now become to him the centre of the world; this agonizing problem the one thing that mattered. He told himself that he would at least go

and see her as often as he saw fit ; who could prevent his making short professional calls on a patient whom he now once more regarded in a peculiar sense as his own case ?

But the few minutes spent by him at Lilywood availed him nothing. He found his patient better than he had expected ; and it was clear that everything had been done, and that with a most intelligent and thoughtful care, for her comfort. Burdmore was in close attendance on his wife, and when Glyn saw the man's gentle and kindly manner to the sick woman, when he heard Miss Burdmore's melodious voice explaining to him some trifling arrangement she had devised for "poor Louisa's" greater ease, he felt suddenly ashamed of the terrible thoughts he had been harbouring against these two people, and by the time he reached his own house he was once more in a maze of dismay and doubt.

It was on his return to Rosedene that Glyn felt that he was indeed out of joint with the rest of the world ; for the first time the fact that a note from Mary Morgan was waiting for him brought dismay instead of pleasure, for the girlish handwriting, generally so welcome, reminded the doctor that he had no longer only himself to consider in life. Everything that affected his professional standing, his social repute, to say nothing of his material prosperity, concerned closely not only Mary herself, but a whole group of people to whom he had owed nothing but bare courtesy a short year ago. If he made a mistake now, in this matter of Mrs. Burdmore, the consequences would affect Mary as much as himself, and it would not be her criticism alone that would have to be faced, but also that of her father, the clever, successful lawyer with whom Glyn never felt wholly at ease.

If these were the thoughts which the sight of Mary's handwriting on the letter evoked, his annoyance and despondency were not lessened when he discovered that her note was concerned with a matter which grated on his present mood, and yet to which he had to give his immediate attention.

Mary Morgan, naturally quite unconscious of what had happened that morning at Lilywood, had written to acquaint her *fiancé* with some trifling change in the arrangements which had been made concerning that afternoon. Her mother had promised to take another friend as well as Mrs. Burdmore in her carriage to the Rectory garden party, and this had necessitated a change in the Morgans' arrangements, and made it desirable that Glyn should drive both sisters instead of only Mary to Boxford. In the quiet life led by John Morgan's two daughters such a gathering was something of an event. It was the last time before her wedding day that Mary Morgan would see and be seen by the neighbourhood. Would George, so she wrote, communicate the alteration in their plans to Mr. Whitby, and would he be sure to call early at The Haven, as their mother did not wish to stay too long at the Rectory?

"I had forgotten all about that Boxford garden party," exclaimed Glyn vexedly. "But I'm afraid I can't get out of it!"

"Of course I needn't go," said Whitby, quickly. "I'm not at all in the mood for that kind of thing. For the matter of that, I'm sure if you tell Mrs. Morgan what sort of time we had this morning, she would quite understand—and so would Miss Mary."

His last words were provoked by a sincere concern for his friend. Glyn seemed worn out; there was a

look of oppression and anxiety on his face—a look, or so Whitby told himself, quite disproportionate to the cause which had brought it about.

But George Glyn shook his head. He knew very well that his defection would cause disappointment not only to the Morgans but to many others of Mrs. Pomfret's guests. In a country neighbourhood everything is discussed, every debateable point debated. Glyn wished to avoid being implicated in any gossip concerning Lilywood. Not only Mrs. Morgan but other people as well would certainly ask why Mrs. Burdmore's illness should make it impossible for the doctor to keep a long-standing engagement, and were she to take his excuses to Mrs. Pomfret she would have to make the most of the reason for his absence. No, no! Whitby of course could do as he liked, but he, George Glyn, would have to go and make himself pleasant to the many kindly folk who were just now engaged in showering wedding gifts on him and on Mary Morgan.

In the end both men went. Whitby, not seeing why Mrs. Burdmore's illness should form a bar to his spending the afternoon at Lilywood, had sauntered up the road very soon after lunch; but to his discomfiture he had become aware that his presence was not acceptable to either brother or sister. Both had greeted him with warmth, but Miss Burdmore was apparently absorbed in her sister-in-law, and in the course of a desultory talk between the two men Chris Burdmore made it clear that he regarded Whitby's presence at Boxford as a foregone conclusion—nay more, he had given him a long and particular message for the rector, to whose acquaintanceship he seemed to attach considerable importance.

“They're nice people,” he said confidentially, “and

I feel that Mrs. Pomfret would be a good friend for Cynthia."

Whitby, not having seen the lady in question, could neither agree nor disagree, and he had thought the remark rather absurd. Still, he retraced his steps to Rosedene, and when it came to the point he made up his mind that it would be pleasanter to make a fourth in the expedition to Boxford than to be left behind. Indeed, during the drive, with pretty laughing Jenny sitting by his side on the far from comfortable back seat of George Glyn's phaeton, he forgot Lilywood and Mrs. Burdmore's illness. But Cynthia was never out of his mind, and more than once he caught himself wondering why she had so obviously desired him to leave that afternoon.

Once at Boxford he felt transformed for the nonce into another world—a world in which he felt, though it would have been impossible for him to have given a reason for his knowledge, that Cynthia had no part or parcel. Chris Burdmore would have been at ease among all those ordinary, cheerful, country folk, with their little interests, their horizon bounded by all that happened in the immediate neighbourhood; not so Cynthia Burdmore. Even on that day, during the very few moments he had been with her in the presence of her sister-in-law, Whitby had been aware of something in her which was remote, inaccessible, and it had disturbed him. But he had no wish to see her at such a function as this gathering promised to be. Ten minutes with her alone was more to him in his present mood than an hour spent in her company surrounded by others.

Each member of the party from Sunniland, with the possible exception of Jenny, had thoughts that day

which they kept hidden from those about them. Mrs. Morgan had not been as much surprised and moved by the news of Mrs. Burdmore's illness as George Glyn had expected her to be. Of course it was unfortunate that Mrs. Burdmore was ill again, but this was not her first relapse, and Mrs. Morgan was placidly surprised that George Glyn seemed to take it so much to heart.

Something of consequence to herself had occurred that day, a trifling matter truly, and one which she had not chosen to confide to any one, but it had disturbed and not a little pained her.

Just before starting for Boxford she had received an answer to the letter she had sent her old friend, Richard Munstead. This answer had been couched in the most formal fashion—Mr. Munstead presenting his compliments to Mrs. Morgan and declining with stiff thanks her invitation to the wedding of her elder daughter. It was a little matter, and of no real moment, and yet it had saddened her, for Mary's mother was one of those women who like to think that the world is filled with only happy and contented people.

As for gentle, sensible Mary Morgan, she was seriously disturbed. During the four young people's short drive, she had become increasingly aware that George Glyn was not only ill at ease, but suffering from some real weight of care, and it was with a feeling of pain and anxiety that she joined the chattering crowd.

Womanlike she managed to conceal her state of mind far better than did her betrothed during the wearing hour which followed for them both. In a country neighbourhood every one feels a proprietary interest in a doctor as much liked as was George Glyn, and on this occasion his approaching marriage made him naturally more interesting than he would otherwise have been.

With his hostess, Mrs. Pomfret, he had quite a sharp passage of arms. She seemed to show what in his present state of mind appeared a most unreasonable interest in the illness of Mrs. Burdmore, cross-examining him as to the details of the attack, and trying to force him to say exactly what he thought was the matter with his patient.

"Why, one would think from the way you speak, Dr. Glyn," she said at last, "that there was something to conceal, something really mysterious about the poor woman's condition! You ought to get Dr. Locke to see her. She wrote me such a pleasant note last week, and seemed to be so looking forward to being here to-day. I feel quite concerned about her." And though she smiled kindly at her guest, she was telling herself that she had never particularly liked Dr. Glyn and that he had a singularly sulky, awkward manner; further, that to-day neither he nor Mary Morgan looked as two young people ought to look within a fortnight of their wedding day!

At such a country and town gathering as was this garden-party, no man, however refined and unassuming may be the girl to whom he is engaged, but feels that he is one of the two central figures of a triumphal progress in which he plays the part of the slave attached to the victor's car. Mr. Morgan had made some sort of joking allusion to this fact when seeing his wife and daughters off to the party, and Mary had at first thought that something of the kind was perhaps one reason why George looked so unlike himself to-day; but she had soon come to the conclusion that there was some other and graver reason for his abstraction and air of unease.

When at last they found themselves left alone, in a

more or less secluded part of the garden, she put her hand on his arm. "George," she asked, "is anything the matter? You look so—so unhappy!"

For a moment he debated whether he should really confide in her—tell her of his terrible predicament. But Glyn had always been used to keeping his own counsel—his mother had been a nervous, fidgetty woman—so he put the thought from him. "I *am* unhappy," he said, "but it has nothing to do with—us. Still, it's a serious matter. It concerns a patient. I don't want to tell you about it—yet. Don't ask me or I shall be tempted to tell you."

"Is it anything," asked Mary, in a low voice, "which may cause another postponement of our marriage?"

She was honestly trying to obey George Glyn, but, in spite of herself, her mind was darting hither and thither, seeking the clue to the mystery. She implicitly believed what he had just told her, namely, that the matter which was so distressing him did not concern their own relations to one another, and yet—yet he implied that it was extremely serious for them both; and so, though the one assurance had brought keen relief, the further statement troubled her greatly. What kind of thing could possibly affect their joint lives, hers and George's, and yet lie outside their personal relation to one another?

"I don't know whether it will lead to our having to postpone our marriage," Glyn spoke in a low, perplexed, unhappy voice. "I mean, I find it impossible to make up my mind as yet as to what my duty ought to be in the case with which I am dealing."

"I suppose it would be no use asking father's advice?" Mary spoke hesitatingly; she knew well enough that the two men she loved best in the world were not

wholly sympathetic the one to the other. She was aware that her father would have preferred her to marry a man in a more prosperous position than Glyn could perhaps ever hope to obtain. The father and daughter had had a conversation, painful to them both, on this point, for Mr. Morgan, like most men who have risen from straitened means to affluence, perhaps exaggerated the part which wealth plays in the happiness of the average woman.

Glyn looked at her in silence.

"It's not that I wish you to consult him," she said quickly, "it's only that he has had a great deal of experience, George, and he might be able to find a way out for you."

"I'm afraid that your father would not look at the matter as I look at it," he said at last. "But I promise you that if my difficulties increase, I will go to your father—indeed, I should consider it most dishonourable not to do so, if I thought I was going to be involved in any trouble or—or disgrace that might involve you after our marriage."

"Ah! But your troubles will be my troubles then," she said, "even your disgrace my disgrace," and she spoke more easily and gladly than she had yet done. But her words only made him sigh. He was bearing a burden of doubt none could bear with him.

And then what appeared to George Glyn the one piece of good fortune which had befallen him that day came to pass. A message was forwarded to him from his house asking him to go and see at once a patient whom he had left that morning comparatively well; "I must leave now," he exclaimed, "you will tell the others, won't you, my darling?" And as she nodded her head her eyes filled with tears.

While hurrying away from the rectory, he passed Whitby. "You'll have to make your way back to Sunniland alone," he cried; "I've got to go off to a farmhouse near Steeples Common—it's a good long drive."

Whitby looked round about him; Jenny had become absorbed in a circle of young people. Why shouldn't he make his escape too? "Do let me come with you," he said eagerly, "I consider that we've both done our duty pretty thoroughly here, eh?"

The young man realized that during George Glyn's honeymoon he would have to be in close touch with many of the people who were now about him, and the knowledge was unwelcome. Why couldn't they leave him alone—at any rate till they were ill? The little world of Sunniland was quite enough for him, and the friends he had made at The Haven and at Lilywood provided all the company he was likely to require during the time he acted as *locum tenens* for his friend.

Both men felt a sense of relief, almost of positive pleasure, when they found themselves well away, driving through the winding lanes. For the first time for some days they fell into desultory professional talk, Whitby, as was his wont, quoting his father at every turn—saying what his father thought about this, and what his father would do about that.

"I wonder," said Glyn at last, and as he spoke he turned and looked at the younger doctor steadily, "what would be Dr. Franklin Whitby's advice in the following case? I put it to Locke not long ago—he had one opinion, I another."

Whitby roused himself with an effort. "What sort of case?" he asked. "I can generally tell what line my father would take. Put your case to me."

"It must have often happened," said Glyn slowly, "that a man with a large private practice comes across what he takes to be a case of slow, systematic poisoning. Now Locke says that it's the duty of a medical man to discourage such suspicions in himself until he has secured what practically amounts to *proof*. As he of course pointed out to me in support of his view, the most extraordinary coincidences—in the way of symptoms I mean—sometimes present themselves, and of course we all know that the occurrence of symptoms resembling those produced by poisoning may be pure accident."

Whitby smiled; the problem interested him in a special manner, for a reason which will presently appear. "And what do *you* think a man should do in such a case, Glyn? I take it you didn't agree with Locke's view."

"I didn't agree, and I don't agree," answered Glyn, with some excitement, "for the obvious reason that if one waited too long in such a case the patient might die! It has always seemed to me that a medical man should be prepared to run a certain risk of blame, even of professional censure."

"Well, that's an interesting point, and particularly interesting to me, for as a matter of fact, Glyn, my father was once faced with very much such a problem."

"That's very curious!" exclaimed Glyn looking round into the other's smiling face. "Well, what happened?—go on!"

"Father had reason to suspect, in fact I suppose now he would say he felt sure, that a patient of his, an elderly man named Underwyke, was being poisoned—and by his wife, who was quite young, very pretty, and popular! It was when father first

started in private practice, in one of those old-fashioned suburbs where all the people of a certain standing know one another."

"And what did your father do?" asked Glyn, with a painful eagerness of manner.

"Well, father was in an awful hole," said Whitby—he enjoyed telling his story—"for the Underwykes were important people, and of course he was a young man having his way to make in the world. So he made up his mind to consult Jock Crome. Crome was a sort of father confessor to all the men of that generation."

"And what was Crome's advice?" asked Glyn; the reins lay loose in his hands, he was staring in front of him, listening eagerly.

"Crome said exactly what *I* should say in such a case. He told him to avoid at all costs any public scandal. But he did advise him to risk saying a word—a very plain word—to the pretty wife. Crome told him exactly what he believed would happen—and what he was to do if the woman showed fight!"

"What actually did happen?" asked Glyn briefly.

"Well, father, like a wise man, took Crome's advice to the letter. He's often told me how awfully frightened and sick he felt as he walked up the drive of their big villa. He felt as if he would rather have been hanged than go through with the job. But the pretty wife made it easy for him, and it all went off quite nicely. Of course he didn't tell the lady that he suspected *her*; all he said was that he was practically certain that her husband was being poisoned by some member of her large household. He needn't have been so frightened, for what old Crome had foreseen would happen, did happen. The sweet young poisoner expressed great gratitude for the warning, and very soon her old husband

began to get better. When he was quite well again, Mrs. Underwyke told my father that she had had reason to suspect his valet, and that she had got rid of the man quietly—with, as they all saw, the happiest results!"

"And was that the end of the story?"

"Yes, so far as father was concerned." Whitby hesitated. "But there *was* another ending, Glyn, and a rather tragic one." He went on in a graver tone: "Father had left the place, and had already been established in London about a year, when he saw in the papers an announcement of the death of the old man. Mr. Underwyke had died at some seaside place, and father was still sufficiently interested in the case to take the trouble to go down in order to find out what he could about—well, the matter."

"And then?" said Glyn.

"Well, the result of his investigations made it quite clear to father that the fair lady had found some G. P. more gullible, or more susceptible, than he had been himself."

"What an awful thing for him—for your father!" exclaimed Glyn; there were dread, horror, condemnation in his voice. "What remorse he must have felt!"

"Remorse?" repeated Whitby, rather nettled. "He felt nothing of the kind—why should he? He had done all he could. You wouldn't have had him ruin his practice by accusing a popular, pretty woman of a crime which it would have been almost impossible to prove." He spoke sharply, for he felt that his friend was blaming, unconsciously—or was it consciously?—the father for whom he had so whole-hearted an affection and admiration.

"Sometimes," he went on, "I think you're really too

scrupulous, Glyn; life wouldn't be worth living if one felt as you do about things! I can assure you father has never felt remorse, as you call it. After all, he did his best, and got the old fellow a further lease of life. But though he can look back and smile *now*, it was no laughing matter *then* for him to have to go and tell a woman that she was found out—that, of course, was what it came to. Luckily that sort of thing doesn't happen to one doctor in a thousand. Yet, oddly enough, ever since then father has been convinced that a great deal of secret poisoning goes on which is never found out—why, it's a perfect hobby with him. He has a most splendid collection of reports of trials—all dealing with poison in some shape or other, and I've heard him discuss such cases by the hour."

CHAPTER XXIII

DURING the days that followed the garden party at Boxford Rectory, the house hidden in the grove of high trees continued to be to both men the centre of their universe.

But in how different a sense! To Glyn, Lilywood had come to appear an outpost of Hell, where evil triumphed and vile cruelty masqueraded as loving kindness; but to Peter Whitby the house where Cynthia Burdmore lived, and which owed to her its dainty orderliness and comfort, was a spot as near Heaven as any he had ever known.

The young man had once more fallen into the way of spending every spare hour with the Burdmores, and his friendship with Cynthia seemed to grow ever closer and closer, although the deep instinctive feeling he cherished for her remained wordless. With what, to any onlooker, would have appeared Chris Burdmore's eager connivance, they spent long hours out of doors, sitting in the little wood, within cry of the house, and yet alone as a man and woman are seldom alone in early days of acquaintance. Whitby would often have completely forgotten the sick woman had it not been that Burdmore, generally in close attendance on his wife, would come out now and again, ever speaking of her with easy kindness and affectionate concern. He and Whitby became on more cordial terms than they had

been, and Whitby grew ashamed of having ever thought Christopher Burdmore selfish.

Yet another matter drew them together. When he had hesitatingly revealed his scheme for getting Mrs. Burdmore into one of his father's two nursing homes, he had been agreeably surprised by the alacrity with which the husband welcomed the suggestion.

"It's a splendid idea!" he exclaimed, "and I'm awfully grateful to you for having thought of it. But pray, Whitby, don't allow your father to feel that we can't afford the proper fees! My wife, you know, has money of her own."

It was with some triumph that Whitby had reported the conversation to George Glyn; he had not, however, repeated what had been Burdmore's closing words, "But it must not be suggested to her till after the wedding! Louisa's very keen on being present at *that* affair. She's getting a new gown in honour of the occasion."

In any other place but Sunniland, Peter Whitby's absorption in Lilywood, his constant presence there, and the fact, clear to any one who cared to look through the palings,—namely, that he often spent long hours alone with Miss Burdmore, talking to her while she worked, and helping her in the trifling "chores" with which she filled up the rest of her time when out of doors, would have made a great deal of talk. Not so in Sunniland; there each house had about it certain characteristics of the fortress which is to be held, or which may have to be defended, against all comers; and at The Haven, where this was not in any sense the case, the whole household was absorbed in preparations for the coming wedding.

Whitby was filled with the selfless exultation of a

man deep in love. For the present, at any rate, he was instinctively content to bide his time. Even now he did not admit to himself what ailed him, for the attraction he felt to this still, quiet woman older than himself was very different from what he till that time had understood to be the passion of which the manifestations are often so absurd and transitory.

Cynthia surrounded herself with an aloofness which to the man over whom she had cast so powerful a spell was perhaps her most potent charm. There are natures with whom intimacy does not beget confidence; Cynthia told Peter Whitby nothing—not even that which she might legitimately have told of her past life. And yet, during the short time they had known one another, she had grown more attached to the young man, and had acquired a better opinion of him than she had ever thought to have of any human being again.

Perhaps because she had herself so largely contributed to tie the magic scarf about his eyes, his blindness did not strike her as extraordinary, and more than once she had winced when Chris had spoken slightly, and with half-laughing contempt, of their new friend. More than once, also, Chris had sharply angered her by referring to her influence over Peter Whitby. Yet the fact that the young man hung on her words, and that he was only happy and at ease when they were together, was just now very pleasant to her.

When sitting out of doors with Peter Whitby she was able to put far from her the haunting anxieties, the sudden terrors, which always beset her when she was alone. While listening to his not very brilliant conversation, she was able to forget for a few moments, and to an extent she would have thought impossible a month ago, the unhappy woman who lay ill, with so mysterious

an illness, in the house close by—that selfish, affected being for whom Cynthia had so intense a loathing and contempt, and who she knew felt on her side, in addition to a distrust which was so largely instinctive, the jealous dislike of her which the ailing have for the sound.

So it was that to Cynthia Burdmore as well as to Peter Whitby their friendship was a fragrant oasis; but whereas the young man thought that this was but a beginning of happiness, the woman knew that they were nearing the end. She was well aware, or rather she fully believed, that she would pass out of Peter Whitby's life with the dramatic suddenness and completeness with which she had already passed out of the life of more than one ingenuous and kindly human being with whom the swift snag-filled current of her life had brought her into contact.

Sometimes there would occur to her the dreadful thought that a day might come when Peter Whitby would know her as she was—or rather not as she was, for Cynthia Burdmore was to herself passionately justified of her own acts, but as those in whose social morality he had been nurtured would believe her to be.

At such moments something hard and repellent would come into her manner, and Whitby would leave Lilywood unhappy and discontented, wondering what he could have said or done to offend his liege lady. At such times, again, she would speak to him derisively of George Glyn and of Mary Morgan, and of their commonplace ideal of life; Whitby, while defending his friend, would yet agree with her more perhaps than she, at the time, realized.

Looking back later to those halcyon days, Whitby lived to remember with aching heart that Cynthia had so

far been honest as sometimes to speak of their friendship as though it were destined to end. She would tease him by allusions to the distant future when they would be apart, if still full of kindly feeling the one to the other; but Whitby, happily blind, thought that in so speaking she was alluding to his own departure from Sunniland after the Glyns' return from their prosaic honeymoon.

One day she angered him by what was at the time on her part a most unexpected lapse of taste—but the time came when he absolved her even from that.

"I wonder," she had said, "if I may venture on a prophecy concerning your future?" And when he had eagerly assented, she had gone on very deliberately, and with a gravity which he felt ill-beseemed her words,

"Some day, Mr. Whitby,"—for they remained on the most formal terms of address with one another,—“when I am far from home in some horrid colony, I shall take up a London paper some kind soul will have lent me, and I shall see that ‘a marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Peter Whitby, youngest son of Franklin Whitby, M.D., and Jane, younger daughter of John Morgan, of The Haven, Sunniland’”; and as Whitby, reddening angrily, protested, she had added composedly, “Yes! yes! Mr. Whitby, there’s much more in Jenny than in Mary—and you must admit that she’s clever, pretty, amusing—” then, perhaps seeing that the man to whom she was saying these curious things was not only angered but disgusted, she had abruptly changed her tone, and ended, a trifle plaintively, “It’s generous of me to say all this, for little Jenny Morgan doesn’t like me—” and her look had challenged Whitby to a denial which died away on his lips.

But it was because Cynthia Burdmore's outburst had seemed to him so little in keeping with the reserve and refinement which were to him not the least of her charm, rather than because of any annoyance to himself, that Peter Whitby had regretted this little passage of arms. Jenny and he were now on easy, pleasant terms with one another; her sister's marriage, her unknown aunt's approaching visit, apparently absorbed the young girl to the exclusion of everything else. She had but little time to go to Lilywood, and Mrs. Burdmore, well pleased with her husband's constant presence and attentions, did not seem to miss her visits.

During those same days, George Glyn was going through a terrible period of miserable doubt and anxiety. Not only did he think unceasingly of what he ought to do, but he was compelled to debate constantly within himself as to what it was in his power to do. If it had not been for the fact that each day still brought with it a round of professional work, he would have suffered even more; as it was, the hours spent in attendance on the chronic ailments of his ordinary patients contained his only peaceful moments, for everything apart from the problem now absorbing him seemed unreal and of no account.

Mrs. Morgan, while strictly adhering to the excellent rule she had made early in life of not interfering in other people's business, yet felt more than once called upon to chide gently her future son-in-law concerning his apparent determination to go on with his profession up to the very last moment. "I think it's too bad of Mr. Whitby," she said to her younger daughter, "not to relieve George of some of his more tiresome patients." But Jenny did not assent, as Mary in such

a case would have done. "Why, mother!" she exclaimed, "it's all George's fault; why he's even attending Mrs. Burdmore again!"

But Jenny's answer brought no comfort to Mrs. Morgan; to her old-fashioned mind such conduct on a lover's part was to say the least of it very unsatisfactory. During the early spring months, when the whole neighbourhood had been suffering from bad colds, George had always managed to find plenty of time to spend with his betrothed—but now he was very little at The Haven, and Mr. Morgan's cynical remark to his wife pointing out that "doubtless George was aware that soon he would have quite as much of Mary as he wanted" made the mother angry.

To tell the truth, George Glyn's relations with Mary, well and truly as he loved her, were painfully affected by the mental crisis which he was going through. The fact that his future wife was to a certain limited extent in his confidence made him, when with her, remember rather than forget his trouble; and if to those about them the young doctor simply seemed rather duller and more silent than usual, poor Mary knew that he was suffering from acute anxiety concerning a matter which he had to keep secret from her, and which at any moment might mean the postponement of their marriage.

Mrs. Burdmore was now once more wholly in Glyn's charge, and by what seemed at the time a terrible irony of fate, the unfortunate doctor seldom went into, or rather left, Lilywood without experiencing a strange revulsion of feeling. It was then that he would be, perhaps for some few hours, miserably ashamed of his suspicions; never more so than when actually in the sick woman's presence, for, as was natural to one whose

daily life was on the whole as prosaic a matter as George Glyn's, it was well-nigh impossible to regard Louisa Burdmore as the central figure of a sinister tragedy.

"Poor Louisa" was an intolerable patient; a disagreeable as well as a mean-souled woman, ungrateful and ungracious to the doctor for whom she was fond of sending on the slightest pretext.

During those days of agonizing doubts, Glyn came to marvel, not only at Burdmore's patience and kindness to his vain, exacting wife, but also at Cynthia's gentleness and self-command. On his daily morning visit, that is before Peter Whitby had put in his usual appearance, it was with Cynthia that Glyn had to deal. Often they found themselves leagued together in opposing some wholly unreasonable desire which might have had the effect of throwing back the invalid, and of delaying the course of her convalescence.

There was something proud and self-respecting in Cynthia Burdmore which appealed to the doctor, for, whereas Burdmore always surrounded his wife with an atmosphere of fulsome flattery, his sister resolutely refused to gain her way with the invalid by pandering to her incessant demands for sympathy and admiration. Little by little Glyn found himself once more in the position of friend and confidant of both the brother and the sister; indeed, to so reserved a man as was George Glyn, there was something almost shocking in the plainness with which Burdmore more than once spoke to him about his money matters.

"Just now," he said on one occasion, "I unluckily have to live on poor Louisa, and it's pretty difficult I can tell you, Glyn, to get her to sign the necessary

cheques. When I went up to town the other day, I had a job offered me which would have suited me down to the ground. It was to take charge of a lad whose people want him to go a voyage round the world. But when I came home and told my wife about it, she simply wouldn't hear of it! She resents my being idle, and yet she can't bear me to do anything which will take me out of her sight—queer, isn't it?"

He had made his little complaint with easy good-humour, and during the whole of the rest of the day Glyn told himself that his suspicions were surely unfounded. It was evidently greatly to Burdmore's interest to keep his wife alive.

And yet it was because of that very conversation that there came back, with overwhelming force, all Glyn's anxieties and suspicions.

It might reasonably have been supposed that the doctor would never have occasion to speak to Mrs. Burdmore concerning the offer her husband had mentioned, but it so fell out that she herself gave him the opening at a time when the doctor and Miss Burdmore were both in the room, for Glyn never saw Mrs. Burdmore alone.

He had listened, with some indignation, to a sudden outburst of grumbling on the invalid's part at Burdmore's absence, and that although Chris had only gone out for a walk with Whitby after having spent the best part of the afternoon with his wife.

"He's got nothing to do!" she exclaimed, fretfully, "and yet he always seems busy when I want him! My poor father used to say it was an awful thing having an idle man about a house."

Cynthia flushed deeply; one of the things Glyn liked about her was her great devotion to her brother, and the

self-command she showed in never interfering in the slightest degree between husband and wife. Even now she said nothing.

"I don't think it's fair to call your husband an idle man," said Glyn slowly, "in fact, I should like to tell you, Mrs. Burdmore, that I know how very disappointed he was that you didn't allow him to take that offer which was made him the other day."

Poor Louisa's sallow face turned a dull red; she was surprised and angered by the doctor's rebuke. "It never came to an offer," she said sharply, "the people wanted too much money—they always do."

"I am alluding to the offer made him of going a voyage round the world. I tell you frankly, Mrs. Burdmore, that I consider it would have done him a great deal of good, as well as being work which would have been congenial to him."

He turned to Cynthia and added, "I think your brother must be a very pleasant travelling companion."

"What's all this about?" Louisa Burdmore looked from the doctor to her sister-in-law with quick, suspicious eyes. "I never heard about this offer! Why wasn't I told? Not that I would let Chris go away—why should I? He's my husband, and I didn't marry to be left alone—but all the same, I think I ought to have been told. Did you know about this, Cynthia?"

Miss Burdmore hesitated; and when at last she spoke, George Glyn—a curious feeling of bewildered anger now possessing him—did not believe what she said.

"Nó, Louisa. Chris said nothing of it to me. I suppose it happened last time he was in town, just before you fell ill. Perhaps he thinks he mentioned it to you. But as you say, he must have known well

enough that you wouldn't have let him accept such an offer."

Glyn let the matter drop, but, as Cynthia Burdmore followed him downstairs and out to the gate of Lilywood, there was a look on his stern, pre-occupied face which warned her to say nothing, to make no attempt to explain away the lie—inexplicable to such a man as himself—which had been told him by Burdmore.

CHAPTER XXIV

BUT that which went far to confirm George Glyn's terrible suspicions occurred the day after he had discovered Christopher Burdmore to be so wanton a liar.

Cynthia Burdmore had scalded her hand, not badly, but enough to cause considerable pain ; and when, on the occasion of the doctor's visit, there arose a question of her going up to prepare Mrs. Burdmore for him, she refused, with a touch of irritability very unusual in her, to do what her brother suggested.

"Louisa's all right," she exclaimed wearily, "she is dressed to-day. I really don't feel well enough to go upstairs now, Chris."

Burdmore hesitated a moment, and then he shrugged his shoulders ; and Glyn went up alone, for the first time in his knowledge of this strange household, to "poor Louisa's" room.

As he walked quickly up the winding staircase he realized that now, if he only knew how to use it, was his opportunity ; even a very few moments alone with his patient should tell him some of the things he wanted so terribly to know. Yet he felt nervous and uncertain as to what to do. How was he to word his questions to this poor woman whom he neither liked, nor wholly understood, and examples of whose touching love for, and belief in, her husband he had witnessed so many times ?

Fortune, however, favoured him, for even Mrs. Burd-

more seemed aware that there was something untoward in her thus seeing her doctor.

"Why this is the first time we've been alone together!" she exclaimed; "I'm so glad to see you without either Chris or Cynthia being by, for I want you to back me up, Dr. Glyn, about your wedding! I'm sure I shall be well enough to go to it, and I can see that Cynthia is quite set against my being there."

Mrs. Burdmore was sitting up in one of the Louis Quinze armchairs, upholstered in white leather, which looked so out of place in the country bed-room. She was clad in a showy silk lace-trimmed wrapper which had the effect of emphasizing her appearance of illness and age.

As she spoke she motioned Glyn to take a chair opposite to her. "You're looking rather glum," she observed. "Aren't you looking forward to your wedding, doctor? But in any case I feel sure you'd like to see me there."

Glyn moved uncomfortably in his chair. To such a question no man, least of all no doctor, can answer truthfully.

"Of course I shall be very pleased," he said ruefully, "and if you go on as well as you're now doing I'm sure you'll be able to come." And then, as he stared into the plain, common-featured face to which middle age had brought neither character nor dignity, he began again to doubt whether his suspicions were not preposterous.

After all, Peter Whitby might be right! The woman sitting there before him, simpering and bridling, was doubtless hysterical. It was clear that she was morbidly desirous of making herself interesting, and George Glyn was well aware of the lengths to which

such a patient will sometimes go in order to deceive those about her.

He leant forward. "As we are alone, Mrs. Burdmore," he said, with a not unkindly smile, "I should like to take the opportunity of saying something to you. I know how fond you are of your husband, and you and I both know how unhappy your condition makes him. Now I wonder if you will be hurt with me for saying that your state of health depends far more on yourself than on your doctor! Of course I know that you were very ill some days ago—but see how much better you are now! Why, it's amazing! I can't help thinking that your improvement is owing, in a measure, to my approaching marriage. Supposing there was not going to be a wedding at Sunniland, do you think you would be as well to-day as you are now? Is it not possible that you might have enjoyed the luxury—for to you it is a luxury, Mrs. Burdmore—of being ill a little longer?"

Glyn was a shy man, but he had already had a great deal of experience with women, and especially with nervous, hysterical women. This was not the first time he had appealed to such a patient, and with good results. In any case his words could do no harm; and he was glad to have had the opportunity of uttering them.

Then, to his surprise and concern, the woman, into whose narrow obstinate face he had been looking with half-humorous deprecation, burst into a storm of tears. "Oh, how cruel you are!" she exclaimed, "and I—I, who thought you so kind!"

"Come," he said, soothingly, "come, Mrs. Burdmore, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." He hesitated, and then looking at her fixedly continued, "Doctors often

know far more than they're told; I beg you—nay, I implore you—to tell me if these attacks of illness have any cause which you have thought proper to hide from us all. If this is so, Mrs. Burdmore, and if you will confide the truth to me, I give you my word that no one shall ever know, least of all your husband or your sister-in-law.”

“Oh, Dr. Glyn,” she sobbed, “indeed you don't understand.” She clutched hold of his hand. “I'm not hiding anything from you, why should I? But I never see you alone, I'm never able to tell you anything. It's Cynthia's fault that I'm like this! She hates me! The very sight of her makes me miserable! I'm better the minute she goes out of the house! When she's here alone with me, I shake with fear. I hate her—I'm afraid of her!”

George Glyn felt a thrill of keen excitement. Was he now on the edge of an awful discovery? Would this poor soul tell him what it was she feared? Did she really fear anything? But his manner betrayed nothing of what he was feeling, and he patted in a kind, reassuring fashion the thin claw-like hand now trembling in his.

“Come,” he said, “don't exaggerate, Mrs. Burdmore. You are quite safe with me; and I ask you to tell me exactly what you mean. What do you exactly intend to convey by saying that it is Miss Burdmore's fault that you are ill, like this?” Then, fearing his question was too direct, he added, “Why is Miss Burdmore living with you if you and she dislike each other?”

“I'm sure she'll always live with us!” Mrs. Burdmore cried hysterically. “I don't believe she'll ever go away; Chris is used to her—she makes him comfortable! Of course I don't deny that she's got certain good

qualities; she's a good manager—a better manager than I; but then you see I've never been used to housekeeping, and I hate servants—a nasty idle lot of people living on their betters!"

"But she's always attentive to you, isn't she?" persisted Glyn, quietly. "You've nothing very tangible to complain of, have you, Mrs. Burdmore? You can tell me anything you like; you needn't be afraid that I shall betray any confidence you make me."

Louisa Burdmore seemed struck by the gravity of the doctor's tone. She withdrew her hand from his, and hesitated. "I can't explain it," she said feebly. "Cynthia's not exactly unkind, though often hours go by without her speaking to me at all. But she's got a sort of terrible power over me, Dr. Glyn. She seems to know when I'm going to be ill. Why, once," she looked at him doubtfully, "I saw her get everything ready!"

George Glyn stifled an exclamation. "What do you mean, Mrs. Burdmore? Think of what you're saying——"

"It's quite true," she persisted. "It was just before my second attack here. She thought I was asleep, and I saw her getting ready the fomentations. Suddenly I opened my eyes wide, and she gave me such a strange look, doctor, and smiled a little. 'Yes, Louisa,' she said, 'I'm afraid we shall be wanting these before long.' And we did, Dr. Glyn."

"Nurses often get an almost uncanny prescience concerning their patients," said George Glyn thoughtfully, but the sick woman in her excitement and distress only caught one word.

"Uncanny? Yes, that's just what I call it! Who would ever think that Cynthia and Chris were brother

and sister—she so cold and silent, Chris always so kind and sympathetic. Why, the very sight of him makes me feel better! But I try not to be selfish,” she added, rather pathetically; “it’s hard on Chris having an invalid wife. But I told him I was not a strong woman; I was quite honest with him. I was always going to doctors, even before I married, but I was never ill as I am now. They used to tell me there wasn’t anything the matter with me, and that all I wanted was something to do! I used to feel so angry with them; but they were quite right about my not being really ill; I wasn’t ill then—not ill as I am now.”

“How long have you been married?” As George Glyn asked the commonplace question he felt that his heart was thumping against his breast, or rather he experienced the sensation which had often been described to him as that of a beating heart.

Mrs. Burdmore waited a moment; a faint colour came into her pallid cheeks. “I don’t see why I shouldn’t tell you” she said at last, “but Chris doesn’t want people to know. He thinks that when he gets a practice, we should have a better chance of doing well if we were supposed to be old married people.”

“But aren’t you old married people?” asked Glyn, in a low voice. He was sheltering his eyes with his hand, for he didn’t wish the woman he was questioning to see his face.

“We were married this last Easter,” said Mrs. Burdmore simply. “You know what they say, doctor: ‘Happy the wooing that’s not long adoining.’ Well, that was my kind of wooing. Chris and I were both paying-guests in the house of a widow lady at Southsea—it was not like an ordinary boarding-house, some-

thing very superior to that. I lived there for years—first, when I wasn't at all well off, and afterwards, when I came into my cousin's money. Chris came there quite by accident—he was looking out for something to do; it was just a stroke of good fortune for me."

Glyn moved his chair a little closer to his patient. "Yes?" he said again, "yes, Mrs. Burdmore?"

But she wanted no pressing. "Someone else wanted to marry me at that time," Mrs. Burdmore smiled self-consciously; "an old gentleman I had known for some years—but I never hesitated, I saw at once that Chris was the husband for me. He says he felt just the same when he saw me, and that he'd never wanted to marry any woman before! Isn't that strange, when one thinks what a good-looking, clever man Chris is?"

"And was Miss Burdmore there, too?" asked Glyn.

"Oh, no, that was the time Cynthia was governess to the Dunns, those people at Canterbury who seemed so fond of her. But her engagement with them came to an end not long after we were married, and Chris was anxious that she should join us. He thought it would make me more comfortable."

"Then since your marriage, Mrs. Burdmore, you haven't had a permanent home, I mean until you came here?"

"No," she said, and a look of weariness crept over her pale face, "and I got so tired of moving about! We made quite a long stay at Southampton, partly because I fell ill there. But the doctor whom Chris sent for was so very disagreeable; not at all like you, Dr. Glyn; he was angry, I suppose, because he couldn't make out what was the matter with me. He was quite insulting to Chris; he actually offered to take me into his own home, just as a friend, for a

month, and I wouldn't have minded that so much, but he made the extraordinary condition that Chris wasn't to come near me the whole of the time. Of course we couldn't hear of that, and I soon got better, but no thanks to him! Then Chris saw the advertisement of this house. The Dunns had talked to Cynthia about Sunniland, and so we came here. Though I don't care for Lilywood, we do like Sunniland very much. Every one is so nice and kind to us." In a different, a more eager tone, she added. "I hope to meet some of the people who have entertained Chris at your wedding, Dr. Glyn. When I'm well again I mean to have some of them in to tea. There's not any real necessity," she hesitated—"why we should live in this way—I mean without servants. When Chris gets a practice, of course everything will be all right. But we're saving up my money to buy a practice. Cynthia says that then she'll go away, and take another engagement, but of course she wants to put it off as long as possible—I can see that!"

"And yet the life Miss Burdmore lives here can't be very pleasant." Glyn spoke his thought aloud, and it seemed to sting the sick woman.

"Of course it's pleasant," she said sharply, "pleasanter than having to work!"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Burdmore," he said mildly, "she's not exactly idle now."

He got up. In a sense he had learned all he wished to know, but his perplexities had increased. There was something half insane in the sick woman's dislike of Cynthia Burdmore; and then Glyn, being the manner of man he was, felt far more inclined to concentrate his suspicions on the husband than on the sister-in-law. It was hard enough to suspect the man

with whom he had in a sense become intimate to be a criminal of a peculiarly cold-blooded and dangerous type, and yet Cynthia Burdmore might be her brother's tool—so much Glyn was reluctantly compelled to admit was only too probable.

He bade the woman who had unconsciously told him so much that he had feared to know, a brief farewell, and made his way downstairs.

And then it was that the doctor's "bad manner" stood him in good stead. "She's better," he said, awkwardly, "decidedly better; I tell her she'll be quite well again before my wedding." But instead of going home, George Glyn took a long solitary walk, during which he debated with miserable indecision the agonizing question as to what he was to do.

A medical man owes a duty, not only to his patients but also to those near and dear to him, and last, if least, to himself. George Glyn's mind, usually lethargic and logical, was now a seething sea of conjectures. Nothing in his experience had prepared him for the ordeal he was now enduring. He had always tried to do his duty, and he had always on the whole found it easy to do it. But now he found himself face to face with the most difficult, as well as with the most awful, problem which can present itself to a medical man.

Then, suddenly, there came to him what seemed an inspiration from Heaven. Why should he not go to London and confide in Peter Whitby's father? Who was better qualified to advise him than the famous specialist who not only had a lifetime of worldly wisdom and shrewd sense behind him, but who had himself passed through the same dread experience?

CHAPTER XXV

DR. FRANKLIN WHITBY sat back in the arm-chair which, like everything else in his spacious, airy consulting room, had been designed to afford the utmost comfort. He felt tired, overwhelmed with the peculiar brain weariness induced by hours of talking to strangers, and especially to women, with whom it is necessary to be on guard.

It was close on one o'clock, and the famous consultant had dismissed what he hoped would be his last patient, when there came the ting of the electric bell hidden under his writing-table, warning him that his morning's work was not yet over. A look of annoyance came across his square, clean-shaven face—the face of a successful barrister rather than that of a great physician.

Franklin Whitby owed his vogue and material success to the wholly artificial conditions of a certain section of modern life. He had been among the first to speculate and specialize on the peculiar physical conditions created by the wear and tear incidental to the fashionable woman's life. Being that essentially modern product, the doctor who is also a man of business, his nursing homes, where took place the rest-cures which he almost invariably recommended to his patients, were admirably managed, and many an invalid, after having dreaded the ordeal, came to look upon an occasional sojourn under what was felt to be the specialist's hospitable roof, as a luxury.

Franklin Whitby despised the short, curt manner which he was told was so successful an asset to certain of his younger rivals; he himself was ever kind, judicious, and courteous, wise father confessor as well as doctor. Each woman who placed herself under his care generally ended by bringing her daughters, sisters, and friends, and if one of his less successful colleagues whispered "charlatan," he did not allow the fact to disturb him. Indeed, Dr. Whitby might have taken as his motto, "They say—" "What say they?"—"Let them say." And then with advancing years he had had the satisfaction of seeing even the medical world come round to most of the theories he had been among the first to put forward, and now he was widely known as perhaps the greatest practical authority concerning certain obscure types of nervous disorders almost wholly confined to women.

Like all really successful men, Franklin Whitby had his own code of morality, one to which he adhered most strictly. His personal character was of the highest; and the charming wife to whom he was devoted, the good-looking sons and daughters of whom he, the kindest of fathers, was so proud, counted for something in the liking and confidence he inspired in those who came to consult him concerning not only themselves, but others, in what were often delicate and trying circumstances.

No wonder that Franklin Whitby accounted himself a very fortunate man. What mattered it that the great current of new discoveries and new experiments swept by, leaving him untouched, almost unmoved; the thing with which he dealt, that is human nature, remained just the same. Those who feared they were suffering from deadly diseases, very rarely came to the beautiful

house in Carlos Place. Why should they? Dr. Whitby's patients only needed rest to set them right; and so it was seldom his painful duty to pass judgment, to deliver a verdict of death.

Perhaps because his professional career was so far removed from the realities of the ordinary doctor's life, Franklin Whitby's hobby, if hobby it can be called, was criminology. He delighted in good, and even in indifferent, detective fiction, and that whether it were printed in French, German, or English; and as other men collect rare editions of their favourite authors, Dr. Franklin Whitby was known to the book trade as a generous buyer of reports of even obscure murder trials, and especially of those cases which had had a poisoner as central figure. Poison dramas held for Dr. Franklin Whitby a peculiar fascination, for the one highly-coloured event in the now elderly physician's long and prosperous life had been the experience of which his son had given a brief account to George Glyn.

Even in the midst of his busy, over-full life, it was strange how often Franklin Whitby's mind went back to that distant episode; indeed, he never saw a certain type of pretty, fair woman with green eyes, without at once casting his mind back to Mrs. Underwyke.

But on this hot July morning, one of the last of what had been to him a particularly prosperous London season, the doctor's thoughts were far away from that old story of his youth. Not only was he mentally tired after many hours' work, but he had promised to take his youngest daughter out to lunch; accordingly, the knowledge that yet another patient desired to see him was unwelcome.

In answer to the warning tinkle, he touched a spring which he knew would indicate to his well-trained man-

servant the fact that before showing the visitor into the consulting-room, his master required his presence.

As the man came in, and quietly shut the door behind him, Dr. Whitby looked up and asked wearily, "Well, Robson, who is it? Any one you know?"

"No, sir—no one I've ever seen before—a gentleman, F. Flyn, I think the name is, sir, but he's forgotten his card. Shall I bring the docket?"

The doctor shook his head impatiently. The name suggested nothing to him. "According to my idea, sir," ventured Robson, "he's a medical gentleman from the country."

"All right, show him in."

Dr. Whitby was relieved to hear that the unknown visitor was a man and not a woman; for just now he was even more tired of ladies and their ailments than was usually the case; and when, a moment later, George Glyn was ushered into the luxurious consulting-room, the doctor could scarcely conceal an involuntary smile. Robson was certainly a valuable servant, with an amazing knowledge of human nature.

The visitor now walking with hesitating steps towards Dr. Whitby was obviously a country doctor, who, instead of first writing, as he ought to have done, to the great London specialist, had thought it his duty to come himself to explain what he took to be some obscure case of nervous disorder in a great lady who, after a wearying season in town, had fallen ill, as many of them did, in the country! He saw with relief that a very few moments would dispose of this young man; as was, however, his invariable rule, Dr. Whitby greeted his visitor with a genial kindness of manner which went far to put George Glyn at his ease during the first difficult moments of the interview.

Later, Franklin Whitby blamed himself most harshly for what he termed his gross stupidity ; but at the time, and during the whole of the ensuing conversation, no suspicion of the connexion which just then existed between his visitor and his own son, Peter, crossed the specialist's mind.

"And now," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"I have come to consult you concerning a very difficult and painful case," said Glyn gravely, "and I am emboldened to do so by the fact that you yourself were once involved in a matter of the kind many years ago—at least so your son tells me."

The older doctor looked up quickly. The mere fact that his visitor knew one of his sons was a recommendation. "Which of the boys was that?" he said, smiling.

Glyn looked up surprised. "Why, Peter, Dr. Whitby—of course it was Peter."

"Oh, yes—I suppose you were at Guy's together?"

"Yes, though, as you know I think, I'm considerably senior to him."

The famous physician smiled good-naturedly. This young man took himself very much for granted ; but no doubt he had been to the house in past years. The boys' friends were always welcome. Still, for the life of him he couldn't remember ever having seen the plain, but strongly marked, features of the man who was now sitting close to him.

"You've not yet told me," he said, "to what case you refer. I've had a good many cases in my time."

Glyn opened his lips to speak ; a look of painful indecision came over his face. This was to him a terrible, a crucial moment. For the first time he was about to put his suspicions into words.

"Yes?" said Dr. Whitby, encouragingly, "yes, Mr.—er—r Flyn? Of course anything you tell me shall be treated by me as being strictly confidential."

Meanwhile he was racking his tired brain to think what his boy Peter could have told this young man—and then, quite suddenly, the knowledge leapt on him; his mind became illuminated, and with it away flew the brain fag which had been so apparent in him and to him the moment before. Could it be that the case which was about to be put to him had any relation, any similitude, to the Underwyke affair?

"Have you come to consult me," he said, eagerly, and unconsciously lowering his voice, "concerning a suspected case of secret poisoning? If yes, you may indeed count on any help I can give you! No man living can enter more sincerely into your feelings than I can!"

"Thank you," said Glyn, hesitatingly. "I hoped—I thought—it would be so, but I should like to tell you, Dr. Whitby, that so far it's only a case of suspicion."

"Of course! Of course! It always *is* that—unless you're expected to be a conscious accessory after the fact!" The doctor made his grim joke smiling. But it was very gravely that he added, "And now tell me all about it."

Glyn proceeded to tell his story plainly, haltingly, in as few words as possible. Unconsciously he minimized rather than exaggerated the reasons he was able to adduce for believing that Mrs. Burdmore's attacks had not been due to some natural cause. Further, he did not, at this early stage of the conversation, mention the name of the patient whose case he was laying before Dr. Whitby, and he also forgot to say what to so many

men would have been, and as a matter of fact was, an essential factor in the case, namely, that Christopher Burdmore was of the same profession as himself. Putting his fears into words was a great relief, but it had the opposite effect to what he expected, for, instead of intensifying his suspicions, it made him feel how curiously little he really had to go upon.

Far otherwise was the effect produced on his listener. Dr. Whitby, resting his chin on his left hand, listened in absolute silence till the other had had his say out, and then he muttered but one word, "Antimony!"

"Antimony?" repeated Glyn doubtfully.

"It might be one or two other poisons, of course—but to my mind there's very little doubt that in this case it's that. I remember quite well Crome saying to me, 'Antimony is the poisoner's best friend,' and though one hears of wonderful new poisons which are supposed to leave no trace, and so on and so forth, in nine cases out of ten some form of antimony is used by the skilful poisoner. I would go so far as to say that in seven cases out of ten antimony successfully eludes detection—or, it would be more true to say, suspicion!"

"What makes me doubtful," said Glyn, thoughtfully, "is the recurrence of the attacks. This very morning I went and looked up the various authorities, but every case quoted implied but one, or at the most two, administrations of the drug."

"Ah! and that is why the people in question were detected!" Dr. Whitby spoke with a kind of triumphant conviction which rather jarred on the other. But this question touched the famous doctor nearly, for, like all those interested in criminology, he had many personal theories concerning poisoners and their methods.

“The intelligent poisoner,” he went on eagerly, “destroys his victim slowly, that is naturally,—if one may use such an expression in such a connexion,—for in that way alone can he accustom the medical man in attendance to become thoroughly familiar with the symptoms. It is clear that in your case you have very clever people to deal with, for whereas the kind of attack you’ve described, if ending the first time in death, would arouse the suspicion of even the most stupid general practitioner, a series of slight attacks is far more difficult to diagnose with any certainty. I confess the case you have put to me interests me exceedingly.”

Glyn moved uneasily in his chair; once more Dr. Whitby’s way of treating the problem jarred on him. He looked earnestly at the older man. “And what is the duty of a doctor who in such a case can only suspect? I know what Crome advised you to do, but my position unfortunately is a very different one from what yours seems to have been. Everything is narrowed down to two people, a brother and a sister, who—who are by way of being my friends.” It was on his lips to add, “and the friends of your son also,” but he refrained; why bring in Peter unnecessarily?

“Have you made any effort to try and discover how they are procuring the drug?”

“No,” stammered Glyn; “but, unfortunately, it would be only too easy for Burdmore to obtain anything of the kind he wanted.”

“Burdmore?” The name awoke an echo in the other’s tired mind. He felt sure he had already heard the name of Burdmore, and that recently, in connexion with a rest-cure case, but it was, after all, not a very uncommon name.

“I don’t quite understand,” he said. “Why should

the man in question, this Burdmore, find it easy to procure poison? Is he engaged in chemical work of any kind? Surely not, from what you tell me? Believe me, you'll be able to do very little without first finding out what is being actually administered, and how it is being procured. In the case of Mrs. Underwyke I felt morally convinced that the drug was being procured for her by a man who was, I am sorry to say, an ornament of our own profession! He was already the woman's lover, and he wished to become her husband.

"But Burdmore is a doctor too," said Glyn sombrely.

"Is he indeed?" exclaimed Dr. Whitby. "But that's a very important point!" He told himself that the young man before him was certainly slow, aye, and stupid. Why he had omitted the point of his story, and such a very interesting point, too!

"Your case," he continued, "comes nearer and nearer to the Underwyke affair. Believe me, Mr.—er—er— I realize very well what you must be going through just now. It is over thirty years since I had a similar experience, and I remember every incident as if it had happened only yesterday! In fact, I don't mind admitting to you that the affair was what turned the scale, and made me give up general practice. You see, the position of the G.P. in such a case is one of such terrible responsibility and difficulty, especially if another medical man is involved! To my own personal knowledge, three or four medical careers have been checked, nay, in one case fatally injured, by an involuntary connexion with a story of the kind."

"I know that," said the younger man, in a low,

troubled tone—and the other went on, as if answering some invisible critic: “If the doctor does nothing—lets ill alone, so to speak—he has to face the tribunal of his own conscience; and if death actually ensues he feels himself to be an accessory, not only after the fact, but *before* the fact. If, on the other hand, he follows what a layman would consider the only obvious course open to him,—that is to say, if he bestirs himself actively in the matter,—not only is a very heavy burden of proof laid upon him, but he becomes connected for ever in the minds of a large circle of people as having played an active part in a very terrible and sordid affair! People don’t care to call in a doctor who has been what they call ‘mixed up’ in such a business.”

“And so, Dr. Whitby, what would you advise me to do?” asked Glyn. “For one thing, I’m terribly afraid that if I do anything to arouse Burdmore’s suspicions he will simply leave the place, and—and—”

“Finish his wife off elsewhere?” Dr. Whitby said briskly. “From what you tell me, something of the kind has already taken place. A pretty couple this brother and sister must be! They evidently made their first attempt at Southampton, and, finding they were discovered by the doctor they called in, the man whose name has conveniently slipped their memory, they have brought their poor victim, most unfortunately for you, within your jurisdiction. As to what you ought to do now——” He waited a moment, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

“The truth of the matter is, Dr. Whitby, that I am, as I think you know, going to be married.”

“Eh? Well, that does complicate matters.” (“Surely,” the doctor was saying to himself, “surely he didn’t mention that he was going to be married?”

However, he may have done so.") "And when," he asked, "is your marriage to take place?"

"The day has been fixed," said Glyn, "for the 29th of this month, and I fear they're only waiting to get me away."

Dr. Whitby nodded his head. The high sense of professional honour and the obvious honesty of his visitor appealed to him; also he was flattered that this rather odd member of his profession had consulted him. This being so, he decided to give him really sound advice.

"Frankly, speaking as your friend," he said gravely, "I see only one course open to you. Go on watching the case,—it's clear that these people will do nothing till you're safely away,—then, on the eve of your marriage, tell your *locum tenens* of your suspicions, and the reasons which have led you to form them. There are certain moments in life when a man is justified in shifting his burden on to another's shoulders, and I think that to you such a moment has now come. From what you tell me, I gather that your whole career is bound up in this country practice of yours—now that's not the case with the man who will take temporary charge of it. He will, of course, have a difficult moment to go through, but he will bring to the problem a fresh mind, and the matter will not be to him of the paramount importance it is to you. A dozen courses will be open to him, and though he may go through a very disagreeable quarter of an hour, it is not likely to affect in any way, *and that whatever happens*, his future life or career."

George Glyn stared at the speaker. He could hardly believe he heard aright the words which were issuing so gravely and composedly from the older doctor's lips.

This in a father was indeed altruism of an unusual, almost of a cynical, kind! Glyn was sorely troubled. How tell Dr. Whitby of Peter's intimacy with Lilywood; and of his evident admiration—though that was too cold a word—for Cynthia Burdmore?

But as the younger man was hesitating, his host rose from his chair. He had heard a young voice in the hall inquiring impatiently for "papa."

It was now some minutes past the hour when he should already have started with his daughter for the smart luncheon party to which he had been bidden to bring her.

After all, there was nothing more to be said. Franklin Whitby felt a little ashamed of the advice he had given; and yet he had no doubt that it was good advice, and that it was the only way out of a situation which he knew must be a terrible one to the man who now stood pale and silent before him. As for the *locum* on whom the burden was to be shifted, he, of course would have to look after himself!

"I'm afraid," he said smiling, "that you don't think very much of my advice; but still, simple though it be, I advise you to follow it. I tell you frankly that it is what I should do in your place!"

As George Glyn, bewildered and dissatisfied, passed through the hall, the pretty vision of a young girl glanced past him. He knew her to be Peter's sister by her bright curly hair, and fresh, pink and white complexion. She looked slightly confused, for she had taken up the docket on which he had scrawled his name and address, and as he was being let out at the front door, she ran into her father's consulting room, the room from which his daughters were generally strictly

banished—"Has anything happened to Peter?" she asked anxiously.

"To Peter?" Dr. Whitby turned round from washing his hands. "Not that I know of. What should have happened to Peter, my dear?"

"I beg your pardon, father,"—she looked rather penitent—"of course I thought that Peter's friend, I mean that Mr. Glyn, had come to see you about him. I couldn't help seeing the name on the docket—G. Glyn, Sunniland."

"G. Glyn, Sunniland?" The towel was flung across the room, and Franklin Whitby, pale with concern, rushed to the door. "Robson," he cried, "don't wait to get your hat, but go after the gentleman who has just gone! He's only left the house a minute! It's very important that I should see him."

But Robson, like most servants who know themselves to be valuable, sometimes allowed himself a little licence. He also was tired with his morning's work; he also was waiting for his lunch. He went to the door with some show of alacrity and looked out. "There's no one in sight, sir," he said dubiously; "the gentleman's quite disappeared."

Franklin Whitby came forward. Neither his daughter nor the manservant had ever seen him so moved. "Look here, Robson, it's a five-pound note for you if you find Mr. Glyn and bring him back within five minutes." He went back into the consulting room and hastily scribbled a note.

"You'll have to go to the Havants' alone," he said to his daughter, who stood by, perplexed and angered at the commotion her innocent remark had caused. "Give this note to Lady Havant and say that I'll come and fetch you." He himself put her in the brougham

which had been waiting so long, and gave the coachman the direction. As he turned, and was about to pass through his front door into the hall, he saw with relief that Robson had overtaken George Glyn, and that the two were now hurrying towards the door.

While he had been writing his suave note of apology to the great lady who had so particularly desired his presence at her luncheon party, Franklin Whitby's subconscious self had been considering with the utmost dismay and apprehension the problem which the case put him that morning now presented to his mind.

The thought that Peter, the cleverest of his boys, the one who had done so well, and whom he intended in time to slip into his vast and lucrative practice, might be associated with so sordid and terrible a business as that apparently going on at Sunniland filled him with horror. How foolish he had been to give this man, of whom he had at the time known nothing, such cynical, even if such useful, advice! It made his present position far more difficult than it should have been.

But Dr. Whitby, among those unusual qualities which make for success, possessed that of knowing that there are times when a certain brutality of speech is of the greatest assistance in helping a man through a difficult pass; and so when George Glyn, surprised and rather perturbed, was again ushered into the great man's consulting-room, he found the other quite ready for him. Indeed, Franklin Whitby, among the many things he had remembered during those few moments of waiting, had recalled with relief the fact that in the young man he had just seen he had to do with one who

was evidently transparently honest and sincere. It would be easier to school such a man, to teach him a lesson.

With a face set in grave, stern lines, and but a muttered word of apology, he led Glyn through into a small inner room, thus making impossible any eaves-dropping from the hall.

"Now, Mr. Glyn," and he did not this time offer his visitor a seat, "I've a bone to pick with you! I must tell you frankly I have only just discovered who you are. No doubt it was very foolish of me, but I didn't catch your name, and so of course I didn't realize that the case concerning which you came to consult me this morning affected not only yourself, but my son Peter! Now, without it's being exactly your fault, my poor boy, through his temporary connexion with you and with your practice, has been placed in a very difficult position! It would be a terrible—a most terrible thing for the lad to be mixed up in such a business."

The great doctor's eyes wavered before George Glyn's look of astonishment, but he went gamely on.

"You will forgive my saying so, Mr. Glyn—I'm a far older man than you—but in such a case you should not have taken me by surprise. You should either have written to me, or, better still, have managed to send Peter home without saying anything of the matter either to me or to him. Why, you actually have at your elbow at Sunniland a tower of strength, the very man to whom in such a difficulty I myself should go—I mean, of course, the solicitor, John Morgan. Why didn't you go to him for advice? I confess it amazes me that you should have come to see me, a stranger, the more so that you didn't mention during the whole

of our conversation the one fact of importance—that of my son's being concerned in the matter."

Glyn remained silent for a moment. The onslaught had taken him completely by surprise, but though the clever man with whom he had to deal had correctly gauged the effect which would be produced on the other's mind by his reproaches, he did not realize that his words had also filled the young doctor with a sudden passion of indignation.

"I came to you," the younger man said at last, "because I thought you were in a position to realize, and even to sympathize with, my awful problem, as few others could do. Then, again, you are Peter's father, and you must remember, Dr. Whitby, that it never occurred to me that you did not know who I was." He ended proudly, "I certainly have no wish to involve your son in any difficulty of mine."

Franklin Whitby had been waiting impatiently for those last words.

"I quite accept your explanation," he said with sudden cordiality, "and you must forgive the way I spoke just now. As for my boy—well, I think, Mr. Glyn, we can leave Peter out of the question! I know you'll agree with me when I say that my son has neither the age nor the experience to deal with such a difficult question as this seems to be, and I'm sure you'll do your best to second me in my efforts to withdraw Peter from any possibility of being mixed up with such an affair."

Misunderstanding the other's silence, he added rather shamefacedly, for, like most successful workers, Franklin Whitby was in no way close-fisted, "Expense need be no object, Mr. Glyn. In fact, under the circumstances I think it would be well for me to find a *locum tenens*,

to whom I myself would explain everything. The risk he would run would not be so very great after all—and—and I should be more than willing to compensate him. By showing a little tact the matter could be easily arranged——”

The interview had gone off almost exactly as he had intended it should do; and his feelings towards Glyn were again quite friendly. “And now you must come and have a little lunch,—just a sandwich and a glass of wine?”

“Stop a moment, Dr. Whitby; I fear it won’t be quite so easy as you think to persuade Peter to leave Sunniland.”

Something in Glyn’s manner made Dr. Whitby feel that another fact of real import had been concealed from him, and his face hardened. “Yes?” he said. Then he sat down and motioned Glyn to do the same. But Glyn shook his head.

“What I’ve got to say won’t take long, Dr. Whitby. It’s simply that your son—to my great regret—has become very intimate with the Burdmores.”

The father got up, and his next words showed that he was possessed of what seemed to Glyn marvellous prescience.

“Ah! Peter has become intimate with those people—that certainly *is* a complication. What sort of woman is Miss Burdmore? Is she young, attractive?”

“Yes,” said Glyn unwillingly.

“Why, this Mrs. Burdmore must be the woman Peter wrote to me about some days ago! He wants her to do a rest cure, and I told him I should have room for her in August.” He looked hard at Glyn. “I understand that he suspects nothing? Well I’m afraid that he must be told,” the father spoke slowly,

hesitatingly. "There's nothing else to be done. And I fear you will have to tell him. I may be wrong, but I fancy Peter will have no wish to stay on at Sunniland, once you have convinced him of the truth of your theory."

"I'm afraid that it will be very difficult, nay impossible, to make him believe evil of Miss—of the Burdmores."

CHAPTER XXVI

How relieved Franklin Whitby would have felt, how revived his confidence in his own customary good fortune, had he known what had happened that very same morning to his son Peter! But the knowledge which would have meant so much to the father would have left the friend, George Glyn, almost unmoved, for it affected not one whit the question which now absorbed him to the exclusion of all else.

Glyn had left Sunniland about two hours when Whitby started out to walk along the footpath which separated Sunniland from Boxford. He was bound on an errand connected with his friend's coming marriage, but his mind, as almost always now, was full of Lilywood; and soon the methodical, acute brain he had inherited from his father became engaged in worrying the problem of Mrs. Burdmore's inexplicable physical condition.

Young as he was, Peter Whitby already had your leading specialist's secret contempt for the average woman patient, and with "poor Louisa" he felt thoroughly irritated, the more so that he was not now himself attending her.

To the young man there was something terrible in an irony of fate which required such a being as was the refined, sensitive Cynthia to waste her life in attendance on Louisa Burdmore! From what he could make out, for though Glyn seldom spoke of his patient Christopher

Burdmore constantly alluded to his wife and to her condition, the silly woman was almost well again. Nay, she was actually looking forward, not only to being present at Mary Morgan's wedding, but, what was far more absurd, to going to the small dance which the Morgans were giving in a few days, and to which, in accordance with hospitable country fashion, they had bidden all their acquaintances. Cynthia had already refused the invitation for herself; she always showed a curious disinclination to go to other people's houses, to be beholden that is in any way to her neighbours.

With the evocation of Miss Burdmore's enigmatic personality, the young man's thoughts took a softer turn; he felt filled with a sudden sense of mingled exaltation and unease. He was dimly aware that she was not only remote, but mysterious; it hurt him to feel how little he knew of her in any intimate sense.

Peter Whitby now acknowledged to himself that he loved Cynthia Burdmore. He had only known her a few weeks, and yet she had become to him an integral part of life. Even five weeks ago he would have laughed at the notion that a sensible man—such a man, for example, as himself—could seriously deflect the course of his career because of a momentary attraction to a being of the other sex! But now he told himself that his whole future, however successful, would be lacking in all savour were it spent apart from Cynthia Burdmore.

And now there was suddenly thrust upon him a perception of the gravity of his state. He faced the facts for the first time, but they did not give him pause. Still he winced as he foresaw the bitter disappointment he was about to inflict on his parents—the father and

mother to whom he owed so much, and who, if indulgent and kind, were of the world worldly.

What would be their feelings when he told them that he had made up his mind to marry, and to marry as soon as possible, a penniless woman some years older than himself—he scarcely knew how few or how many?

It was characteristic of Peter Whitby, of his belief in himself, and also of his hitherto unchecked good fortune, that it never occurred to him that Cynthia Burdmore might refuse to become his wife. In the usual sense of the word he was not a vain man, certainly not vain as regarded his relations with women, and even now he did not flatter himself that Miss Burdmore felt for him a tithe of the love he felt for her. But he knew that she regarded him with kindness; her face always brightened at his approach, and instinct told him—this truly—that they were linked by a close, intuitive sympathy. And yet, had he been capable of analysing Cynthia's relation to him, instead of his relation to Cynthia, he would have realized how much of her fascination lay in her mysterious aloofness, an aloofness which was such a tantalising contrast to the intimate, pleading, almost caressing, manner with which she sometimes treated him.

Did Peter Whitby, during this long examination of heart and conscience, give Jenny Morgan a thought? Yes, for in spite of the convention which is supposed to rule human affairs of the heart, both men and women generally, nay almost always, know the feeling which animates a being of the opposite sex. A proposal of marriage rarely takes a woman by surprise, and too often a man is aware of the favour extended to him before the bestower of the favour could herself give a name to the sentiment which she thinks is wholly concealed. So it

was that Whitby, during the first part of the walk which was to prove so eventful, did not forget Jenny Morgan. Indeed, he thought of her with a curious, remorseful tenderness.

What a fine, if undeveloped, creature Jenny was! How fortunate would be the man who won and wore her! What an ideal wife she would make in two or three years' time to the sort of man he had believed himself to be till he had met that still, silent, enigmatical woman to whom, for good or ill, he now felt so wholly bound.

So filled were his heart and mind with the one image that when, at a turn of the path, he saw Cynthia Burdmore coming slowly towards him he felt as if all were falling out as it should do, and as if the strength of his longing for her had willed her there.

As they met, a troubled look of shame, of embarrassment, crept over Cynthia's face. She had caught the young man's look of glad delight, and that look, so open, so guileless, had hurt her. What a pity Chris had made her go into Boxford that morning on the errand from which she was now returning! It would have been just as easy to send the telegram he had wanted sent off to Rush by some other messenger, but at times Chris had these tyrannical impulses, and in small things Cynthia always gave way to him; so she now reminded herself with an imperceptible sigh.

Without taking the trouble to say that his errand to Boxford would keep, Whitby turned and took his place by her side. He felt absurdly happy. This was the first time that he had ever had the chance of taking a walk in the open alone with Cynthia. He looked down at her—he was a tall man and she a small

woman—with a great feeling of protective tenderness, nay, of adoration, in his heart. Cynthia was walking wearily; the spring had gone out of her light step. He saw with sudden concern that she looked ill; there was a hunted, a haunted look in her dark eyes. The strain of her sister-in-law's illness was evidently becoming a greater burden than so delicately fashioned a being could bear; even the last few days had brought a change.

"Miss Burdmore," he said, earnestly, "I've something to say to you—" With surprise and discomfort he saw a look of apprehension creep over her sensitive mouth. He went on hastily—"It's nothing very terrible—only that I've made all arrangements for Mrs. Burdmore to go away for a rest cure. Please don't oppose it!"

As she shook her head in answer,—and he saw an expression he had already met with on her face, he added, "Well, then, do let me get a nurse down from London? I don't mean an ordinary nurse, but a woman my people have known for years, and who always comes when any of us are ill. She's not expensive." He smiled as he added, "and she has none of the ordinary 'frills' of the trained nurse!"

"Louisa would never consent," she said in a low tone, but he thought he detected a sign of wavering in her voice.

"She must consent!" he spoke with sudden brutal decision. "The state of things at Lilywood is making you ill——"

The slender woman walking by his side turned away and, covering her face with her hands as a child might have done, she began to cry bitterly.

Whitby felt a rush of impetuous pity and tenderness.

They were quite alone—he put his arms round her shoulders.

“Don’t cry,” he whispered, “don’t let it make you so unhappy! She’s not worth it in any way. Why”—he tried to laugh—“if poor Mrs. Burdmore had died from exhaustion the other morning, I shouldn’t have been broken-hearted—so there! It would be better for her to die than that you should be killed by waiting on her—dearest—darling!”

She moved suddenly away from him. Her violent weeping ceased. “No, no,” she said; “you mustn’t talk like that, Mr. Whitby, even in fun! Don’t think it’s all Louisa’s fault that I’m unhappy—for it isn’t.”

She waited a moment, then, with the tears still on her cheeks, turned and faced him, and there came over her face a deep, an unbecoming flush. “You’ve been—you are—so kind a friend to me,” she said nervously, “that I’ve hated being with you, Mr. Whitby, on the terms I’ve been with every one else here. I wish *you*, at any rate, to know my secret——”

Whitby straightened himself; no thought of what she was going to say crossed his mind, and yet he felt a strong premonition of coming loss and pain.

“Mr. Whitby,”—she seemed to find a certain comfort in repeating his name,—“I wish you to know that I am married.” She looked down as she said the words, and after a moment’s pause hurried on, speaking quickly, almost incoherently.

“We are very poor—we had to separate—it seemed the best thing to do. You mustn’t think that I’m unhappy—I mean as a wife. We are very fond of one another, and—and I try, indeed I do, to be a loyal wife, in word as well as deed. I want you to give me your

word never to repeat this to any one, unless, of course, I ask you to do so."

Whitby made an immense effort over himself. Her words had had on him the effect of a disabling blow.

"It's very good of you to have told me," he stammered. "Of course I won't tell any one. By the way, does your sister-in-law know the truth? I suppose she does? Of course she must do!"

He had asked the question without intention, more in order to have something to say, more in order to crush out his own feelings of betrayal, of bewildered pain and resentment, than anything else,—but the apparently unimportant query had an extraordinary effect on his companion. Cynthia Burdmore began to tremble; her hand shook; and Whitby became obscurely aware that she was possessed by some violent emotion to which he had no clue.

She seemed quite at a loss as to what to reply, but at last she spoke, in a firm, rather cold voice,

"I don't know what Louisa knows—I don't know what Chris has told her—I hope you will never speak to her of what I've told you."

Whitby looked at her, perplexed and angry. "Of course I shouldn't dream of ever mentioning such a matter to Mrs. Burdmore, even apart from the promise I have just made you," he said stiffly.

"Forgive me—my dear, kind friend!" She looked up at him with a pathetic appeal in her dark eyes; and his whole being responded. He seized the hand hanging by her side and impulsively pressed it; with tears again rolling down her cheeks she returned the pressure, then withdrew her hand, and, in a shamed, troubled voice went on speaking,

“There’s another thing I ought to tell you—that Burdmore is really my name. I married a cousin. When I came back to England I had to go out as a governess, and you know people don’t care to take a married woman into their household. I didn’t wish to tell or act a lie.”

“Yes, yes, I quite understand that!” exclaimed Whitby hastily.

As a matter of fact he did not understand in the least, or rather one part of his mind was wondering why she should have kept up such a deception when there was no longer any reason or excuse for it; but he was in a whirl of amazement, of intolerable pain, of jealousy. He longed to press questions upon her, to know how far she was doing this strange thing with her brother’s consent.

As he walked silently by her side,—for they did not speak again till they reached the gate of Lilywood, and there said good-bye,—he told himself that he had only himself to thank for what had happened. He had been a vain, a presumptuous fool! At no moment, so he now persuaded himself, had Cynthia Burdmore given him the slightest reason to think she felt for him any more than the trusting friendship a good woman has the right to feel for any man who shows her sympathy and kindness. Nay, more; she had evidently broken through her strong reserve and told him her secret, because she had become aware that with him matters were going further than was well.

So Whitby believed, and so believing, her avowal for the moment increased, rather than diminished, the devotion with which he regarded her.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE evening of the day which had been so eventful to both young men found them, almost for the first time since Whitby's arrival at Sunniland, spending the evening alone together.

Whitby looked moody and miserable. He was racked with intolerable heartache, filled with the resentment ever felt by a man who meets for the first time an inscrutable, unexpected blow of Fate. Not even for a moment did he find himself able to put Cynthia Burdmore and her extraordinary secret out of his mind.

The two men had finished their simple dinner, and they were now sitting smoking out on the verandah. Since his return from London that afternoon, Glyn had been too much absorbed in his own distress to give a thought to any one but himself, but now he noticed, with a certain dull surprise, Whitby's unease. Was it possible that the task he so dreaded and which he had set himself for this evening would be made easy to him? At the point at which he had now arrived, it seemed incredible that Whitby could still remain wholly unsuspecting of what had come to seem to him so clear, and which had been at once accepted as an unquestioned fact by Franklin Whitby.

Whitby was sitting some way from his host, close to the rose-covered railing. With an impatient movement he suddenly switched off one of the electric lights

which had been beating on his haggard face. Then he sighed—an unconscious, long-drawn sigh.

“Whitby,” said Glyn, “has anything been worrying you lately? Did anything happen to-day while I was away?”

The other looked up with a quick suspicion, but he said nothing.

“I also have been awfully worried,” went on Glyn huskily, “and I feel that the time has come when I ought to say something to you about it.”

“I can’t quite make out what you are talking of,” said Whitby ungraciously, “is it anything about——” he hesitated.

“The Burdmores? Yes—of course it is!”

“I don’t want to discuss it,” said Whitby, shortly. “And—and forgive me for saying so, but it’s no business of yours,” he muttered the last words between his teeth.

“No business of mine? Of course it is! You don’t suppose I’m going to be such a brute as to go away—and leave you to it?” Glyn got up; he began walking up and down. “I shall go early to-morrow morning and see Mr. Morgan. I shall tell him that our marriage must be again postponed. It’s been postponed once to please him, and now,” he added grimly, “it’s going to be postponed to please me!”

Whitby stared at him in surprise and anger. After all, Glyn was only a few years older than himself; it was not Glyn’s part to play the heavy father.

“I’m not as hard hit as that,” he said roughly, “and—and you don’t know her. You insult her—if you think I’m in any danger *now*. What do you take me for, Glyn? *Of course* I can take care of myself, and as to your marriage, it must take place on the 29th as arranged, anything else would be absurd!”

He broke off abruptly, and then in calmer tones added, "I want you to believe one thing, and that is that she has not been to blame. But Glyn—just one thing. When did she tell you?" He felt unreasonably hurt that Cynthia had also confided her secret to George Glyn.

But George Glyn stood up and began walking up and down. "Look here," he said, "we're talking at cross purposes! I've not the slightest idea to what you're alluding. I thought from something you said just now that you were beginning to suspect something of which I've been, for a long time, practically sure."

"Suspect? Sure?" echoed Whitby. "What d'you mean? What is it—who is it you suspect?"

"I suspect," said Glyn, very deliberately, "that Mrs. Burdmore's mysterious and to us both inexplicable physical condition is due to the systematic, if irregular, administration of some form of antimony."

"I disagree!" cried Whitby. He jumped to his feet and was now face to face with the other man. "I disagree absolutely! I can't even imagine what put such an idea into your head! Then that was the case—the absurd case you put to me; in fact it was your own case you were putting to me the other day? You were trying it on the dog! If you had had the experience of women and their ailments that I've had in the last two years, such a mad idea would never have occurred to you! And then—then how do you suppose Mrs. Burdmore would be able to get hold of any antimony?"

Glyn looked at Whitby doubtfully. The extraordinary heat, the almost incoherent anger, with which he had just spoken took the older man by surprise.

"Burdmore would find it easy enough to get some," he answered slowly.

Whitby came a step nearer. His eyes blazed with anger; he looked dangerous. "Do you mean to tell me that you actually suspect Burdmore of trying to poison his wife—and in that devilishly cruel fashion?" With a sneer he added the words, "Do you suspect Miss Burdmore too?"

"I suspect nobody," said Glyn, at last thoroughly losing his temper, "or rather I suspect everybody who has to do with the unfortunate woman."

"Perhaps you suspect me?" said Whitby,—he laughed a loud, discordant laugh,—"for I've been a good deal at Lilywood lately."

"It's no laughing matter—no matter either for anger or scorn," said Glyn sombrely. "You don't know what I've gone through during the last three weeks. I've not known what to do or who to speak to, and I've hoped—hoped against hope—that I might be wrong. I saw well enough that you didn't suspect anything—even after that attack of hers the other day. As for me, all my fears, nay, my certainty, came back then. I feel that should she now be done to death I should be as truly her murderer as whoever administered the poison. But I'm convinced that nothing will happen to her until I've left Sunniland. Why has the poor creature been getting so much better since the postponement of my wedding became known? Tell me that, Whitby!"

Whitby again sat down. After all, it was a relief to know that Cynthia and her pitiful secret were to be kept out of this absurd discussion. He, Whitby, as poor Cynthia Burdmore's friend, would act wisely in hearing whatever Glyn had to say, and in probing, as it were, the depths of his delusion.

"I beg your pardon for speaking as I did just now, George," he said; "would you mind telling me what has given you this"—he gulped down the word "preposterous" which he would have liked to have used, and substituted—"extraordinary idea?"

"Apart from the purely medical evidence, which you know as well as I do, and which you must admit bears all the signs of poisoning by antimony, I've discovered," said Glyn in a low, reluctant tone, "that a good many of Burdmore's statements concerning himself and his past life are false."

"But Burdmore himself admits that he romances," cried Whitby quickly; "I don't think he would for a moment expect you to believe half the wonderful tales he tells."

"Yes, I know that, and I've tried to allow for it," said Glyn. "But I felt from the first there was something mysterious, I might almost say sinister—but that's rather a big word to use—about both the brother and the sister."

"There is a mystery"—Whitby looked straight at his friend—"I would rather not tell you what it is, but you can take my word for it that it would explain a great deal of what you think so strange. The mystery concerns Cynthia Burdmore, not her brother, and it fully explains, I will not say the deceit, but the reticence which you find so inexplicable and suspicious."

"Does it explain," said Glyn quietly, "why Burdmore married only a few months ago the wretched woman who, even on your own showing, can only be regarded as an object of pity and repugnance?"

"Look here, Glyn," said Whitby firmly, "I'm not here to hold a brief for Burdmore. I daresay he's done what many a better man than he has done before

him—married a woman for her money. But between that and poisoning her, there's a very long step. Even you must admit that Burdmore, outwardly at least, is a kind and considerate husband; by the way, it would be against his obvious interest to make away with her, for she's well off, and he makes no secret of being really poor."

George Glyn made no answer. He was now very sorry that he had taken Peter Whitby into his confidence—at any rate before consulting John Morgan.

"What do you mean to do?" went on Whitby, with some excitement. "I've a right to know, for, after all, I had the case in hand for some time?" And as Glyn still remained silent, "I must ask you not to go behind my back and take any action without first telling me. If you do that, Glyn, I warn you we shall quarrel! I would stake my life that your suspicion is unfounded."

"It's no longer in my power not to go behind your back," Glyn exclaimed, "for I saw your father about it this morning."

"You did that—and without telling me? I call it damned unfair—not only unfair to me, but unfair to Burdmore!" exclaimed Whitby passionately. "I suppose it was my father who ordered you to tell me—I suppose you both thought that once I knew what you suspected, and what I imagine you have persuaded him is the truth, for he's always been foolishly ready to believe this sort of thing, I should leave Sunniland and cut the whole disgraceful business! Oh, yes, Glyn, I know my father; he wouldn't be at all keen for me to be mixed up in anything of the kind!"

"It's true that under the circumstances your father doesn't wish you to stay here," said Glyn quickly.

"He thinks, and I agree with him, that you have neither the age nor the experience which would make it possible for you to be any use in such a case."

"How dare you insult me so?" the young man's eyes were sparkling with anger. "I'm the best judge of what I ought to do. I repeat that Mrs. Burdmore was, and for the matter of that is still, my patient! Surely, Glyn," he tried to make his voice conciliatory, "surely you won't think of putting off your marriage because of this absurd suspicion—this notion rather. You yourself must admit"—his voice was now shaking with restrained excitement—"that neither Burdmore nor his sister would appear, to one knowing them as well as you and I do, cold-blooded murderers?"

Glyn hesitated. He was impressed, in spite of himself and against his more sober judgment, by his friend's passionate advocacy. "I promise you I won't do anything more without telling you," he said quietly, "but, Whitby—I suppose you would admit my right to consult one person," something in the other's face made him add quickly—"No, I don't mean Mary, I mean her father?"

"Yes, I suppose you have a right to do that," Whitby spoke unwillingly, grudgingly. "I suppose a lawyer can always be trusted to hold his tongue. But, unless I'm much mistaken, Mr. Morgan will take my view, not yours, and perhaps you will believe him, even if you won't believe me. In any case I feel pretty sure that he won't hear of your putting off your marriage."

"As to that," said Glyn, "I'm afraid I shouldn't feel at all bound to follow his wishes in the matter. In such a thing as this, a man is forced to do what he himself feels to be right. He can't put his conscience into another's keeping."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE come in every life certain tragic and passionate moments when the mere fact that everything is going on just the same in the world about us, and especially in the world of which we ourselves form a component part, seems not only incredible, but an added outrage at the hands of fate. To Peter Whitby in a great, and to George Glyn in a lesser measure, the happy state of bustle and animation found by them both at The Haven on the morning following their painful and hostile conversation was well-nigh intolerable.

George Glyn's absence in London the day before had annoyed and surprised even Mary. To the girl her aunt's return home after an absence of over twenty years was a great event, and she felt that her fiancé ought to have been at Sunniland to welcome her; and yet even when on his way back from town, when he had gone for a few moments into The Haven, he had refused her mother's invitation to spend the evening there.

Pinpricks became stabs that day. Both young men resented the fact that Mr. and Mrs. James had asked permission to invite down from town a young American friend of theirs, a certain Tink J. Turner, to the dance that was to take place that evening. Mrs. Morgan, either to please her sister or from natural hospitality, had improved on the suggestion, and the American was already at The Haven by lunch-time.

How long, how noisy, how unutterably weary to both

Glyn and Whitby was the usually pleasant meal. Mr. Tink Turner was one of those Americans who seem to have been created to avenge their countrymen for the criticism lavished so freely on America in the past by English travellers. Too civil to find fault directly with all he had seen in England, he simply compared everything English—from the English railway engine to the English rose—with its American equivalent, greatly, of course, to its detriment. This made his conversation peculiarly disagreeable to Whitby, the more so that Mary and Jenny Morgan paid the stranger the compliment of listening attentively to all he said, and that Mrs. James, after long years spent in the States, actually endorsed most of his unfavourable comparisons.

At last they all went into the garden, but even there things did not get much better. Glyn was anxious to be alone with Mary. He wished her to know that he was about to tell her father of the matter which was so deeply troubling him. But Mary clung to her mother's side.

John Morgan and his brother-in-law had gone off to London for the day, and so, to Glyn's mingled relief and disappointment, the question of what exactly he should say, and of how much he should confide, to his prospective father-in-law, was postponed. He made up his mind, however, that he would speak to Mr. Morgan the next day, and he assured himself that he would not be turned from any course he thought right by anything the lawyer might suggest or advise; but this determination did not make the coming conversation any the pleasanter to contemplate.

For the first time since Mrs. Burdmore's attack, neither Glyn nor Whitby had called at Lilywood that

morning. From very different motives each had decided separately that he could not face either Christopher or Cynthia. Then, by one of those little ironies of which life is full, Lilywood and its inmates suddenly seemed to fill Mrs. Morgan's mind.

"As far as I know, the only people in Sunniland," she observed, turning to her sister, "who have ever been to America are the Burdmores. I think you will like them, Polly. Christopher Burdmore is coming to dinner to-night; according to his own account he's a very good dancer. As for his wife and sister, I hope we shall see them at the wedding, but Mrs. Burdmore is an invalid, and she may not be well enough to come. I suppose you never came across them by any chance? They seem to have been in America quite a long time."

Glyn waited for Mrs. James's answer with suspense in his heart. What would he not now give to meet anyone who had known the Burdmores in the past!

"No," said Mrs. James indifferently, "I never even met anyone of that name; rather an unusual name, isn't it? You know America's a rather large country, Jane."

And then there rose up, in the warm, perfumed air, a voice which fell with curious knell-like distinctness on the ears of George Glyn.

"I know those Burdmores! They're Florida people, or rather they were. I shall be right down pleased to see Chris again. He was a cheerful sort of chap, quite a rocky citizen!" Mr. Tink J. Turner spoke with the drawling intonation, the extreme deliberateness, which many Englishmen find so irritating in the average American's conversation. "They say England's a small country. Well, it is! A week ago I wouldn't have minded taking any bet that I shouldn't come

across these Burdmores during my trip, and then—well, the first person I saw at your little station here to-day was Mrs. Burdmore ! Come to think of it, she did look sick.”

“Mrs. Burdmore?” The two questioning words burst from the lips of almost every person present.

“You can’t have seen Mrs. Burdmore,” exclaimed Mrs. Morgan rather sharply, “for she’s ill—she’s been ill ever since they came to Sunniland.”

“But I did see her,” protested the American in a confident voice. “She told me she had been very bad ever since she came back to England, and that she wasn’t supposed to be well yet. She said she’d just driven up there to look for a parcel, and that she was going straight home.”

“I don’t see why it shouldn’t have been Mrs. Burdmore,” said Peter Whitby suddenly, “there was nothing much the matter with her yesterday. If they weren’t so over-careful of her, and if she was not so over-careful of herself, she would have been downstairs, and out and about, long ago—or at any rate during the last few days,” he corrected himself quickly. “She is determined to come to the dance,” he continued, “and I know she was expecting a dress from London.”

Whitby’s words were received in silence by every one present. His fair face grew red; even Mrs. Morgan looked at him curiously, or so he thought. Jenny felt vaguely sorry for him; how angry and strangely put out he seemed! After all, it didn’t really matter about Mrs. Burdmore.

But George Glyn was staring into vacancy. He felt as if he were moving through the mazes of a fevered dream. Louisa Burdmore had only married some few months ago; she had said “last Easter.” Was she

too a liar, one who, like Chris Burdmore, apparently lied for the mere pleasure of lying? It would seem so.

Just before the informal dinner party which preceded the dance, several members of the party gathered together at The Haven watched with considerable interest the meeting between Christopher Burdmore and the man who had known him in Florida.

Burdmore came into Mrs. Morgan's drawing-room with hand outstretched. "Where's Turner?" he cried; "where's Tink J. Turner?—most excellent of Yankee good fellows! Why, the world's a very little place after all!"

The two men shook hands cordially. There was an eager, quick interchange of talk between them.

"I was very sorry to see Mrs. Burdmore looking so ill," observed the American suddenly; "I hear that she's been really bad since I saw her out home."

A look of annoyance came over Burdmore's face. "Yes, you happened to come across her the very first time she's been out for weeks!" Then, or so George Glyn thought, he changed the subject with adroit abruptness.

Never had Christopher Burdmore shown to more advantage at Sunniland than during the hours which preceded the dance. The presence of the American, or rather of the two Americans—for Mr. James had by this time returned with his host and brother-in-law, and he was as taciturn as Tink Turner was garrulous—seemed to excite and stimulate him. All three told stories, but Burdmore's were by far the best; and John Morgan, sitting listening at the top of the table, admitted to himself that even an idle man may some-

times have his uses, for very dismal, very unlike a wedding festivity, would the dinner have proved, had it not been for Burdmore and his new-found friend. George Glyn, good, hard-working fellow as he was, seemed strangely moody and even depressed.

Mr. Morgan was not alone in thinking these thoughts. Never, so Mrs. Morgan told herself, with cold fear clutching at her maternal heart, had a man looked less like a bridegroom than Glyn; he sat very still, now and again addressing a remark to Mrs. James, and his air of abstraction apparently affected Whitby too, for he also, so his hostess noticed, had to-night an awkward, constrained manner.

That the little dance went off as well as it did was also owing to Christopher Burdmore. It was he whose loud, jovial voice lent gaiety to whatever place he happened to be in; he who flattered the chaperons, and showed the girls the way to the improvized ballroom with the words, "Now, any one who wants to dance with me will have to make up their minds very soon—for I shall have to leave early!"

But in spite of his words, the very last to leave The Haven that splendid July night was Christopher Burdmore. He apologized to Mrs. Morgan with a hearty laugh, "I had meant to go away so early! But then you see I've had such a good time!" He looked round for the American. "Any chance of seeing you down at my place to-morrow, Turner?"

"No," said the other; "I'm off to-morrow morning, worse luck! Only three weeks over here—I mustn't waste my time."

"Sorry!" said Burdmore cordially. "Very sorry! By the way, is Glyn there?" He looked round the hall,

where every one was gathered together. "We might go down the hill together."

"I think George has gone," said Mrs. Morgan; "I've not seen him the last half-hour. Here's Mr. Whitby, however."

"Has Glyn really gone?"

"Yes," said Whitby. "He said he must get back early to write up something in his case-book."

The two men went off together, and then, to the surprise of those who remained, George Glyn suddenly reappeared. His little plan—he called it a plot in his own mind—had succeeded. Disregarding the exclamations with which he was greeted, he walked through into the smoking-room, and there, as he had hoped, he found the American who had made what seemed to him so amazing a statement concerning Mrs. Burdmore.

"I want to ask you," he said abruptly, "if you can tell me anything about the Burdmores and their life in Florida? Perhaps I ought to tell you at once that Mrs. Burdmore is my patient, and that from my point of view it's almost incredible that you could have met her at the station. As far as I know, she's not been out of doors for weeks—in fact not since she first came here, to Sunniland."

The other man was considerably taken aback. He stared at Glyn reflectively, and told himself that Englishmen had very funny manners, much funnier manners than Americans, for instance. Still, the Morgans were being particularly kind to him, and this queer-mannered young doctor was Mary Morgan's prospective husband; perhaps the poor fellow was not aware of how odd, short, and jerky was his manner, and how offensive was the implication that he, Tink Turner, did not know what he was talking about.

"There's not the slightest doubt that the lady I saw

at the station was Mrs. Burdmore," he said. "But I don't think she was over-pleased to see me just then. Still, she spoke just as if we'd met yesterday—quite the English manner, you know. She told me she had been very ill, and I did think she looked pale—pale and thin. But then she always was pale."

"Did you know the Burdmores well?" asked Glyn, slowly.

"Yes," said the other, "I knew them pretty well—or, rather, I knew Chris Burdmore well. An amusing beggar, isn't he? Tremendous yarns he used to tell of his wonderful adventures! He's one of those Englishmen who are too clever by half; the kind who would succeed better if they were less 'cute!'"

"And Mrs. Burdmore?" insisted Glyn; "how about Mrs. Burdmore?"

"Well, I can't tell you much about her. She was always very civil to me, but she kept herself to herself. I used to envy Burdmore—she made his place so nice and neat. A very awkward thing happened to them—" he looked at Glyn, and hesitated.

"What sort of thing?" asked Glyn, quickly. His hand tightened on the arm of his chair. A queer premonition of what was coming swept over him.

"Their partner died," said Turner, reluctantly; "a young fellow who had just come out from home. He had a good bit of cash—in fact he was the sort of man the growers out there are always looking for and don't often find, but he hadn't been there very long when he grew sick——" Glyn's face hardened, his eyes became alert.

"Home-sick, I suppose," continued the American meditatively. His eye twinkled oddly. "The Burdmores were awfully kind to him."

"Did he die?" asked Glyn, in a low voice.

"Of course he did—I thought I told you that he

died," Turner looked at Glyn rather hard. "Died and was buried. He made a will, properly witnessed and all that, leaving the bit of money he had brought with him to Mrs. Burdmore. She'd been awfully kind to him. Then an odd thing happened; the poor fellow had a brother—a ne'er-do-weel—who had been sent out to Canada years before. I expect you know the type—most Englishfolk seem to have some one of the sort in their family: they're known out there as 'Remittance Men.' Well, this particular 'Remittance Man' suddenly turned up, and made an awful row. He tried to force the Burdmores into giving up the dead man's money; there was a lot of talk about it at the time; most of the growers, in fact all of them I guess, sided with the Burdmores. The brother wanted to have his dead brother dug up—as if that would have been any good! But Burdmore got rid of him—somehow, though it ended in Mr. and Mrs. Burdmore leaving the place, and coming home."

"How long ago was that?" asked Glyn.

"I should think quite a year," said the other, thoughtfully. "They didn't sell their grove well, but still they got something for it, and I suppose they've been living on what they got ever since."

"But Mrs. Burdmore has money," said Glyn quickly.

"Has she?" said Turner. "That may well be, though Chris Burdmore always spoke as though he hadn't a red cent. Mind you, doctor, I'm not saying a word against Chris Burdmore. I take people as I find them. It's best so, eh?"

"Then you never saw Miss Burdmore, Chris Burdmore's sister?"

"No, I never knew he had a sister. I never heard him tell of her."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE dance had come to an end rather earlier than country dances generally do. Perhaps Jenny Morgan, alone of the family group belonging to The Haven, had thoroughly enjoyed it. She had, of course, danced all the evening, distributing her favours equally between the young American her aunt had brought down from town, Peter Whitby, who for once seemed stimulated by a spirit of rivalry, and whose manner, if odd at times, seemed more what it had been during the first days spent by him at Sunniland, and Christopher Burdmore, who, rather to the surprise of most of those present, proved himself a very good dancer.

More than once Jenny had caught herself feeling glad that Cynthia was not there. She was a little ashamed of this feeling, but then she had never shared Sunniland's admiration of Miss Burdmore. Chris Burdmore—as she unconsciously called him to herself, following in this the now usual habit of the neighbours with whom he had made himself so popular in so short a time—was certainly a nice man. He had danced a great deal with Jenny, and more than once he had thanked the young girl warmly and feelingly for her kindness to his wife, for the half-hours she spared from her bright happy life to spend in Mrs. Burdmore's shadowed room.

It was of "poor Louisa" that Jenny thought when she woke up the morning after the dance, feeling tired

and languid. She knew there must be a great deal left of the excellent cold supper provided by her mother the night before; and it suddenly occurred to her that she would fill a large basket with dainties of a kind suitable for an invalid, and then walk down with it to Lilywood. She had been there very little during the last few days, but this morning call would make up for it.

Feeling pleased with herself and her errand, eleven o'clock found Jenny standing before the locked gate of Lilywood.

Jenny rattled the gate, but no one came out of the closed door. Then she called out in her clear, ringing voice, "Miss Burdmore! Miss Burdmore!" and after a moment's pause, "Mr. Burdmore! Mr. Burdmore! Are you there?" But there came no answering cry from any of the few windows which gave on that side of the house.

Jenny hesitated—she felt rather absurdly vexed and disappointed. Her basket was very heavy, and the thought of taking it up again and of going all the way home up the hill with it still full was intolerable. What could have happened to them? They never both left Lilywood together.

She hesitated, and a smile came over her bright red lips, for in some moods Jenny Morgan was still more child than woman. She measured the gate with her eyes, and then looked up and down the road. Good! There was no one in sight. Very carefully Jenny lifted the basket, and caught the handle of it on the top of the rustic paling. Then quickly she swung herself up, and came down with a soft thud on the garden path of Lilywood.

She looked at the front door, but decided that she would not knock yet. Perhaps the Burdmores were

having a little rest ; Chris after last evening's dissipation—he had danced the whole evening, first with one and then with the other—Cynthia, no doubt, after an even more tiring night with her sister-in-law. So Jenny took her basket down, and walked sedately round into the garden ; there, choosing a shady place, she would sit down and wait for a while before again trying to gain access to the house.

The path circling the house ended at the deep shadowed recess under the balcony which was a pleasant feature of the house.

Standing outside in the sunlight, Jenny suddenly spied a derelict deck-chair pushed well back below the balcony. What luck was this ! Sitting under there would be cooler even than in the wood.

Still treading very quietly, she made her way into the dark sheltered place ; dragging out the chair she sat down, and, putting her feet up, closed her eyes. Even in this sheltered corner where the sun never penetrated, it was very hot that midday, far hotter than it was up on the hill, at The Haven.

Suddenly Jenny sat up. The sound of voices had wakened her from a deep dreamless sleep—the sound of voices, or more likely that of cane chairs being dragged along just above her head. She was just about to call out when she heard her own name uttered in Burdmore's deep resonant voice, that voice which had taken such caressing inflections when talking to her the night before.

“ I think it must have been Jenny Morgan ! But really I couldn't go down, Cynthia—for I was lying on my bed, half asleep. I can't stand that girl.” He spoke reflectively, as if making a very ordinary statement.

Poor Jenny, sitting up in a cramped position on the deck-chair, flushed very red. Tears rushed into her eyes. She was extremely surprised and hurt. She had always thought Chris Burdmore really liked her. He had always had towards her the half-teasing, half-gallant manner which middle-aged men so often assume when talking to a girl who is just emerging from the school-room stage of life.

She had the magnanimity to remind herself that listeners never hear any good of themselves, and that there was, after all, no particular reason why Mr. Burdmore should like her. Still—still, he need not have pretended, and again a choking feeling came into her throat.

A revelation of this sort is not pleasant, even to the most cynical, and Jenny was very young, and, in spite of her rather positive manner, enthusiastic and generous-hearted.

She remained quite still, almost holding her breath. If only the two who sat just above the place where she sat hidden, would go indoors, she could slip away, make her way out of the grounds by the wood, and send a servant down with the basket!

"I know you don't like her," Cynthia Burdmore's voice was quiet and indifferent. "But I've never been able to see why; she's rather a nice little girl, Chris."

Again Jenny Morgan's cheeks burned. She had never liked Cynthia, and now she felt ashamed to hear her taking, as it were, her part.

"And then she's really very useful to us," Miss Burdmore's gentle voice went on, "I mean with Louisa. It's an odd thing—but Louisa is really fond of Jenny Morgan."

"You'll see plenty of Miss Jenny as long as young

Whitby's about!" the speaker laughed coarsely, and the poor child who was so unwilling a listener felt overwhelmed with shame and anger. What a horrid man Mr. Burdmore was proving himself to be, and how utterly different from what she had thought him! "But it's all thrown away on Whitby," continued Burdmore, "the attraction here isn't Jenny, eh, Cynthie?"

Miss Burdmore's answering words were very cold; they fell with a comfortable sound on Jenny's hot ears. "I don't know what you mean, Chris, and I don't want to know. I don't like that sort of joke, you know I don't—I never did!"

"There, there!" he said, much as he might have spoken to a child, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings; I think you've managed Whitby beautifully, you know that well enough. You managed Glyn very well at first,——" Jenny heard one of the chairs above her creak slightly.

"Then you've noticed it too," Miss Burdmore spoke this time in a very low voice, but her voice was quite audible below the balcony. "I mean the extraordinary change in Glyn?"

Jenny held her breath. What were they talking about? What did this mean, and how strange to hear Cynthia Burdmore call George Glyn by his surname; as a rule she was fastidiously ladylike and correct in her speech. Then Jenny remembered that her own mother, her dear, old-fashioned mother, habitually called many of her husband's friends by their surnames when talking of them to him.

But what was this that Chris Burdmore was saying in so serious a tone?

"Tell me exactly what you mean, Cynthia. What sort

of change have you noticed in Glyn? He's always been awkward and stupid; always tiresome about Louisa's illness. Have you noticed anything different in the last day or two—anything that matters, I mean?"

Ah! they were talking of Mrs. Burdmore. Jenny was glad that they had drifted off to that safe subject.

"Yes, certainly I have," Cynthia Burdmore was speaking in a serious, meaning tone, "I can't exactly explain, Chris; it may only be my fancy, but—but——"

"Probably it *is* only your fancy," said Burdmore lightly. "But still, I must say I think you overdid it last time. Louisa has never been so ill before."

"Except at Southampton," said Miss Burdmore in a low tone.

"Ah! but there the circumstances were so different! We meant then that it should be short, sharp, quick—and now everything is changed," answered the other thoughtfully. "However, it really doesn't matter. Glyn belongs to the breed of scrupulous, fidgety folk who can never make up their mind to do, or even to *say*, anything. The Morgans were particularly cordial last night, and, after all, Glyn will be gone this day week. Remember that we'll only have Whitby to deal with later!"

"There's one thing, Chris, we've never thought of—at least I don't think you have. If—if I'm right—as to Glyn, I mean—don't you think it's possible he might come back *afterwards*?" The speaker spoke with painful hesitation. Her voice had lowered so that Jenny could hardly hear the words. But in the great heat the atmosphere was intensely still.

Christopher Burdmore moved his chair back with a sudden impatient movement. The first part of his answer to his sister was drowned in the sound, and the

unwilling listener only heard the words, "eliminate every element of risk—I've always had to tell you that."

"But we've never run the risk we're running now."

"Well, my dear, we must trust to my luck."

"You haven't always been lucky, Chris."

"I've been wonderfully lucky on the whole." Burdmore's voice rose triumphant. "Think of the luck of our coming across such a place as this, of our finding such a man as Glyn here, and on the eve of his marriage! Then what luck his having hit on such an owl for his *locum* as this young Whitby! No, no, believe me, my dear, on the whole we've been very lucky—very lucky indeed!"

He got up—Jenny could almost see him throw back his shoulders with a gesture very usual with him when excited.

"Let's go in and have lunch," he exclaimed. "I don't enjoy this sort of talk at all, and you've treated me to a great deal of it lately."

"I'm sorry," she said submissively, and then added nervously, "One thing more, Chris,—do you really want Louisa to go to the wedding? You said something the other day as if you really thought she might go."

"I did say so," he answered impatiently, "but of course I didn't mean it. Why, just think who I found at The Haven last night! That Tink left this morning was a piece of luck if you like, Cynthia! We wish to prevent talk *afterwards*; I don't see why more people should see her than is necessary."

The words conveyed very little to Jenny Morgan. With intense relief she heard the speaker's heavy steps creaking over her head, the lighter movements of Cynthia, and then the glass door which separated the studio from the verandah opening and shutting. With-

out losing a moment, the girl took up her heavy basket, and made her way, treading guiltily, through the wood to the edge of the little property ; it was not easy to scale the palings, but she managed to do it, and she found herself, a few moments later, once more on the road, and well on her way home.

Of the odd conversation she had overheard, what remained vividly present to her mind was naturally the few disagreeable words about herself. And yet, though she had been relieved when the brother and sister had at last drifted into a close discussion of Mrs. Burdmore's case, that same discussion had left an inexplicable impression of horror on her mind.

Even Burdmore, who had hitherto seemed so fond of his wife, had on this occasion said no kind word of the poor woman—indeed he had spoken of her as if she was a thing, a chattel, not a human being. And then with what contempt the odious man had spoken to his sister of George Glyn—George who had been so unremitting and devoted in his care of the sick woman, and to whom Jenny already felt the loyal affection of a sister !

There is nothing more confusing to the brain than overhearing the give and take of rapid talk, but there remained in Jenny's memory not only those few stinging words concerning herself, but the constant recurrence, in the conversation to which she had unwillingly listened, of the one word, "*afterwards.*"

CHAPTER XXX

JOHN MORGAN, standing in the middle of a path cutting right across one of the two fields which belonged to his property, saw to his surprise his prospective son-in-law coming slowly towards him.

The solicitor was one of those fortunate persons who know that no perplexing problems, no unpleasant occurrences, are ever likely to confront them at home. When he left his office in Bedford Row each evening, he had the comfortable assurance that he had left trouble behind him till the next morning; and what was true of the working months of the year was just as much the case during his holidays.

On this summer morning Mr. Morgan felt on particularly good terms with life, and this perhaps was why he did not notice at once the look of agitation and distress on the doctor's honest face.

But Glyn's first sentence awoke in the older man the keen suspicious instinct, never far from any mind habitually absorbed in legal work, and gave him, as he afterwards admitted, when talking the matter over with his agitated wife, one of the most terrible jars he had ever experienced.

"I've come to tell you, Mr. Morgan, that my marriage—I mean Mary's and my wedding" (as if there could be any other marriage in the world for them all but his and Mary's!) "must be again postponed."

"Postponed?" repeated the older man; it seemed

to him impossible that he could have heard aright. Why, they were now within less than a week of the wedding day! "Why should it be postponed, George?"

Then he waited, suddenly alive to the look of sombre distress filling the other's face.

But George Glyn for a moment made no answer; and a very unpleasant form of fear took possession of John Morgan.

There are many forms of fear, and from some of the worst the stupid and inexperienced are, fortunately for themselves, delivered. The lawyer knew too much of the byways of human nature, he had come across too many strange and even terrible happenings, to be much surprised at anything told him by a client, but he had never expected to come in contact with a certain type of folly and guilt in his own home circle.

Grimly he set himself to hear one of those sordid stories to which he was so often called upon to listen in the course of what was one of the soundest family practices in London; and while he waited, half-a-dozen, nay a dozen, alternatives presented themselves to his shrewd mind. He had been a fool, so he now told himself with uncompromising candour. Why should he have thought George Glyn different from other young fellows? From the young men, for instance, whose fathers and mothers sought him out so often—John Morgan, the wise solicitor who had acquired the reputation of being exceptionally clever in getting men out of the scrapes into which idleness, viciousness, or simple folly had led them.

"Well, George!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Well, George, out with it!"

But still the young doctor did not speak.

The older man's heart grew very heavy as well as

very stern. He tried to put away from him the image of his darling Mary—Mary, who was so different from all other girls, or so the father fondly believed. She must be saved, at any cost, from trouble or distress. Ah! but that might not be in his power. There was a kind of sorrow from which not the most loving father could hope to save Mary Morgan. He fixed his keen eyes coldly on the downcast face of the man standing before him.

"Tell me all about it," he said, briefly, "I mean what sort of a hole you're in. I hope I may take it that you've said nothing to Mary as yet?"

Glyn looked up, surprised.

"No," he said, "I haven't done that. She knows that I'm much worried about something,—she guessed it, of course,—but she's never tried to make me tell her. That's what's so comfortable about Mary——" a softened look came over his worn face. "She's never once asked me any question about a patient." He added proudly, "She's not that sort."

Mr. Morgan bit his lip. If possible, he would have liked to have kept his daughter's name out of this discussion, and yet he himself had brought her in. He waited impatiently for the younger man to speak again, but the doctor was hesitating, painfully.

"Have the goodness to tell me what it is, Glyn, and at once!"

The suspense was becoming intolerable. Of course, if it was something very bad, the marriage could not be allowed to go on. John Morgan was not the man to allow his daughter to marry a rascal merely because she loved the rascal. On the other hand, if George Glyn had simply acted with the weak folly which so often makes an otherwise sensible man fall into the

clutches of, say, an unprincipled woman, then something might be done to ensure that Mary's happiness should not be imperilled past repair. If only the man would speak! Nothing could be done without Glyn's making a clean breast of it.

"I think you know me well enough to understand that I shall not be hard on you, George."

"I'm sure you won't be that, sir, though I do feel that perhaps I ought to have come to you long ago, when I first began to—to suspect what I am now going to confide to you."

A great weight was suddenly lifted from the lawyer's heart and brain.

"Suspect?" he said, looking at the other attentively, "I don't quite understand, George. What is it—who is it—you suspect?" The relief he felt rang out in his voice.

"I suspect," said Glyn, firmly, and he turned and faced his companion, "I might even say I know, Mr. Morgan, that Mrs. Burdmore is being slowly poisoned—but by whose agency I've not yet discovered."

"Mrs. Burdmore?" repeated the solicitor incredulously. "You mean the ailing wife of that idle fellow to whom my wife and the girls have taken such a fancy?"

"Yes," said Glyn, "Christopher Burdmore's wife."

And then he made a great mistake, one of those mistakes which only the over-honest and scrupulous are ever tempted to make. "And—and the awful part of the business is, Mr. Morgan, that it's just possible I may be wrong after all! If the case is one of acute hysteria—that is what Peter Whitby believes it to be—then any of the symptoms which seem to me so suspicious

might of course be simulated, or—or the woman might conceivably be administering some drug to herself.”

John Morgan had so little expected the extraordinary confidence just made to him by his prospective son-in-law that he did not at once realize its extreme gravity,—all it meant to Glyn, all it might mean to Mary.

His mind travelled in a few moments from Sunniland to London; he put himself in the mental attitude in which he always placed himself when he was interviewing a client in Bedford Row; that is, for the moment, he only saw in George Glyn an over-scrupulous medical man, who had come to ask his advice as to what he should do in a difficult and delicate circumstance. For the time being Glyn was his client, for whom, and only for whom, he was bound to do his best.

“Then I am to understand that you have no proof?” he said quietly, but very firmly. “At least I gather that you have no actual proof of the terrible suspicion you have formed, George? You don’t even seem to suspect any one person of those about your patient of being——” he waited a moment, and then uttered very deliberately the words, “a murderer. This being so, I do not ask you what it is you propose to do, but what you think it possible to do in case your marriage and Mary’s is postponed, as you apparently desire it to be?”

George Glyn looked dumbly at the man in whose wisdom he had such trust, and in whose integrity he had so great a faith. He had never seen Mr. Morgan assume this judicial attitude, and it disconcerted him.

“I don’t know what to do,” he said; then appealingly, “Surely you would not advise me to go away,

Mr. Morgan, and let this wretched woman be done to death?"

John Morgan moved uneasily. He recognized something in George Glyn which was rather unusual—a certain simple rectitude of outlook, which, if a most excellent quality in a man to whom one is going to trust a much-loved daughter's future, may become an uncomfortable peculiarity in one who is, one hopes, about to make a good professional position for himself.

Glyn's question made the shrewd lawyer feel a little ashamed of himself. "God forbid," he said hastily, "that such a terrible thing should happen!"

Then for a few minutes John Morgan remained silent, thinking deeply, and George Glyn, unlike a lawyer's average client, respected his silence.

What an extraordinary, untoward complication! Mr. Morgan had never once been concerned with a murder trial, never even been asked to give his advice concerning a possible drama of the kind.

Slowly his mind travelled to the group of men and women composing, as it were, the cast of the piece.

Mrs. Burdmore, "poor Louisa," as he had heard her more than once half-laughingly called, he had never seen, but he remembered the way his wife had spoken of her eccentric appearance—her jewels.

Chris Burdmore was doubtless an unscrupulous rogue, but not at all what he, John Morgan, would imagine a murderer, and one of the peculiarly cold-blooded type, to appear to those about him. Of course the lawyer knew that there was the best authority for the dictum that a man, even a woman, for the matter of that, may "smile and be a villain"; but would a poisoner—a man who was risking his neck more surely than does any

other type of murderer—laugh as Chris Burdmore laughed, dance as the man had danced only the night before—talk with the extraordinary frankness concerning his own lack of means with which Burdmore had, at any rate on one occasion, talked to the lawyer himself? Mr. Morgan thought not.

Then his mind went off to Cynthia Burdmore. He had seen very little of Chris Burdmore's sister, but he had certainly liked what he had seen of her. She was gentle, quiet, very feminine. Surely George Glyn couldn't have the heart to suspect Cynthia Burdmore of so atrocious a crime? Who else was there? Who in the way of servants? Why, only old Mrs. Muxlow, the charwoman they themselves always employed! Well, she could be ruled out of court.

He looked at the man now standing before him. George Glyn was not the kind of human being who impresses his fellows as likely to leap instinctively to right conclusions. It was most unfortunate that he had taken this extraordinary notion into his head—and did he realize the danger of making such accusations, even to oneself? John Morgan had a very wide knowledge of the laws of libel and of slander. It was this knowledge that prompted his next words.

“I need hardly remind you, my dear George, that the allegation you are inclined to bring is among the most serious in law. You are, of course, aware that being merely concerned in such a business has ruined, or, at any rate, gravely injured, more than one medical man's career? But before giving you any advice,—before, indeed, we can even think of making up our minds as to what to do,—I should like to ask you a number of questions. In fact, I should like to cross-examine you exactly as if you were a witness—a hostile witness.”

"Certainly," said Glyn, eagerly, "I should like you to know exactly what I know—and suspect."

"Well, before I begin, there's one thing I should like to ask you—that is, whether you've spoken to any one about the matter. I trust not—I sincerely hope not." He looked hard at the other, and spoke with great emphasis.

"Yes, I went up yesterday and told Franklin Whitby, Peter's father."

"I'm sorry you did that!"

"So am I, now," admitted Glyn ruefully. "But he was himself once concerned with such a case, and I thought he would be able to give me some really good advice."

"And what did he advise?"

"He gave me advice I feel I can't take," said Glyn, firmly; "he advised me to go away, and leave my *locum* to deal with the case."

Then, seeing that Mr. Morgan was about to speak, nay, that a look of considerable relief had come over the lawyer's face, Glyn hurried on, "But he violently objects to his son's remaining on in Sunniland—he was horrified at the thought of Peter Whitby's being concerned in such a business——"

"So I should have supposed," said Mr. Morgan drily. "Then young Whitby knows nothing as yet? I don't say his opinion's worth much, but I should have liked to know his opinion. He's seen the sick lady, I suppose, and more than once?"

"Yes," answered Glyn, reluctantly, "I spoke to him last night, as his father wished me to do so; but, Mr. Morgan, I have to admit that Peter Whitby entirely disagrees with me. He thinks the idea preposterous, outrageous! Of course, he hasn't seen as much of the

case in question as I have—on the other hand, he's been much more with the Burdmores than I have had time to be, and—and——”

He checked himself abruptly, but the solicitor finished the sentence for him, “And Peter Whitby fancies the sister.”

When he saw the look of deep surprise come over Glyn's face, John Morgan smiled broadly, for the first time. “My wife's not quite so blind as all you young people take her to be,” he observed, then said no more; but there came up, thrown against the screen of his memory, a little scene which had taken place some few mornings before.

The window of Mr. Morgan's dressing-room commanded a view of the tennis-court, and, though it was quite early, the master of the house, while shaving, had noticed his younger daughter and Peter Whitby playing a set.

“Jane,” he had called out through the half-open door into the next room, “Jane, my dear, it seems to me that young Whitby makes himself very much at home here; did you ask him to come to breakfast this morning?” And then, as there had been some delay in Mrs. Morgan's answer, he had added, “I don't think we want two doctors in the family, eh?”

Then the answer had come. “You needn't be at all afraid, John! If young Whitby is in love with any one, he's in love with that quiet, sly creature, Cynthia Burdmore! She won't have him at Lilywood in the morning; that's why he comes here.”

Mr. Morgan and George Glyn went into the house. They were both aware that out of doors they might be disturbed any moment.

"Let's go to the library, George."

Mr. Morgan preceded his future son-in-law into the cheerful book-lined room overlooking the garden, which, after serving as a schoolroom for his daughters, was now dignified by the name of the library.

"Sit down," he said to Glyn, "sit down over there by the little table in the window, and don't look so wretched, my boy. You can believe me when I say I've found a way out of worse puzzles than this is likely to prove."

Glyn looked on with nervous impatience while Mr. Morgan slowly and deliberately moved about looking for ink and paper. Bringing it over to where he intended to subject the doctor to a close examination, he finally went to the door and locked it.

"Now then," he said, at last sitting down, "tell me everything! Don't mind repeating yourself. I shan't interrupt you."

There followed a long pause, for when it came to the point George Glyn hardly knew how to begin.

At last he spoke, but, while trying hard to tell a connected story, he tumbled out his facts, his suspicions, his theories in incoherent sequence. He did not include in his narrative the sinister tale told him by the American. To his mind it did not constitute what John Morgan would accept as evidence. Himself scrupulously truthful, he particularly dwelt on what appeared to John Morgan the trifling discrepancies between what he had thought to be true concerning the Burdmores and what he had afterwards discovered to be the real facts; and the lawyer, after listening attentively, told himself with an almost painful relief that here was, indeed, a very small substratum on which to build^e up anything like a definite accusation. Only

three times did he think it worth while to make a note of the details of the long, involved narrative to which he sat listening in complete silence.

At last he said, "The story you've told me, George, is certainly a very curious one, and I quite understand that to your mind it contains a good deal of cumulative, if vague, evidence in favour of your terrible suspicion; but let us examine, my dear boy, the whole affair a little more closely."

Glyn bent forward. He already felt less burdened, less harassed, than he had done for days; the telling of the story to John Morgan had been an immense relief.

"It has become clear to me," continued the lawyer, persuasively, "that beyond the actual medical evidence, which you admit is slight and uncertain, what has most impressed you has been a number of isolated facts, which might each and all exist without any thought of so terrible a crime as that which we have in our minds. For instance, you formed an impression—it's impossible for me to know whether you were helped thereto by either Mr. Burdmore or his sister—that your patient had been long married to her husband; suddenly you discover by a chance word of hers that the marriage only took place a very few months ago; and, further, that Burdmore had begged her not to let this fact be known! This, if true, only goes to prove that Christopher Burdmore is disingenuous, and fond of small mysteries; it certainly does not provide him with a motive for poisoning his wife!"

"I don't know that you'd say that if you'd ever seen her," said Glyn, slowly. "She's a repulsive-looking woman, and she couldn't have become what she is now in ten or twelve weeks; she must have been repulsive—and—and absurd at the time he married her."

John Morgan looked at Glyn with a certain pity and amusement.

"Justifiable homicide?" he exclaimed. "Well, that's the last thing I should have expected you to say! But let me tell you, George, that when you've lived as long as I have in this odd world I think you'll find that it's quite impossible to say why any two people ever do marry; and we mustn't lose sight of the fact that in this case Burdmore had a good deal to gain. His wife, I understand, has a comfortable income of her own. He has never concealed this fact, for he spoke of it to me some time ago, and, what's more, he mentioned that her income, George, was only a life-interest."

"I beg your pardon," said Glyn quickly, but not as if the matter were of any importance. "Mrs. Burdmore may only have a life-interest in her money, but she has what is called, I believe, a power of appointment, and she has exercised it in favour of her husband."

John Morgan made a slight movement. It was very slight, and was quite lost on his companion, but any one of his clerks could have told you that this slight movement indicated a very perturbed state of mind on their chief's part.

"Indeed?" he said. "That's a rather serious statement. By the way, do you know it as a fact? I mean that Mrs. Burdmore has a power of appointment, and that she has exercised it in favour of her husband? It would, of course, provide what has been lacking—I mean a motive."

George Glyn got rather red.

"Yes, I do know it as a fact. Perhaps I ought to have told you so at first, but there seemed so many other things to say."

Mr. Morgan gave a dry cough. He was quite used

to find a client leaving out the one essential fact in his story, and, as a rule, this peculiarity rather amused him than otherwise, for he was well accustomed to cope with what he secretly regarded as the extraordinary blindness and stupidity of the men and women who came to him for advice. But it angered him to think that the man who was going to become his son-in-law had proved himself as dull as was every one else.

"Quite so!" he observed. "Quite so! I understand that from your point of view the question of motive is comparatively unimportant, but it's the first thing that would occur to the judge and jury should the case ever come into Court. This being so, I should be glad if you would tell me exactly, George, how you learnt this fact concerning Mrs. Burdmore's income, and whether you could positively swear to your knowledge? Or is this another—inference?"

George Glyn looked up, very much nettled.

"Perhaps one reason why I did not mention it just now, sir, is that I learnt the fact some time before I began to suspect what I now believe to be the truth. Mrs. Burdmore, quite early in our acquaintance, said something about a pin, a cameo head of Æsculapius, which had belonged to some friend of her father who was a medical man—and she observed that she would like to give it to me. She went on at some length about the matter, and then she suddenly said that she couldn't part with it during her lifetime, but that, as she was older than I was, I should probably outlive her, in which case she would instruct her husband to give it to me. Incidentally she observed that it was not worth mentioning in her will, as she had exercised her power of appointment in favour of her husband, and she could trust him to carry out any of her wishes."

"Just so," said John Morgan, absently; he was playing with the pen he held in his hand, and there had come up before him with most disagreeable distinctness a vision of the Court-house where are held the Guildford Assizes. He saw a figure in the dock—the rather blurred figure of Christopher Burdmore, a man on whom hitherto he had wasted little thought, regarding him simply as one of those wastrels who were apt to drift to Sunniland for a while and then quietly disappear.

But in the witness-box of the Court-house stood a man whom his imaginative vision focussed very distinctly—too distinctly for his own comfort—for it was his son-in-law, the newly-made bridegroom of his Mary, in the process of being heckled and cross-examined unmercifully concerning the part he had played in a terrible, if sordid, drama, fast developing, thanks to the fostering care of the press, into a *cause célèbre*.

John Morgan lowered his eyes. He fixed them intently on the complicated pattern of the Turkey carpet which had been placed in the room when it had been turned from a schoolroom into a library—but still the odious vision lingered. He told himself that it must be his business to make the scene his fancy had evoked impossible.

"Before I can give you my advice as to what should be done," he said at last, "I should like to have a talk with your friend, young Whitby. He takes, I understand, an absolutely opposite view of the case to what you do yourself. Let's have him up to lunch, and afterwards hear what he has to say. Unfortunately, he can't be left out of any serious discussion concerning the matter. You tell me he insists on staying on here?"

George Glyn nodded.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was a council of war—a council composed only of three which met early that same afternoon in the library of The Haven.

In a sense the solicitor was master of the situation. He alone knew quite clearly what course he desired should be pursued ; and he had age, experience, and a wide knowledge of men and affairs on his side. He had made up his mind that his daughter's marriage should take place on the date arranged, and he intended, if it was in any way possible, to deal with the subsequent situation alone.

There are many ways in which such a consultation as that which was about to take place can be arranged by the convener. He can make it informal, a matter of comparatively few words, and as a rule the legal mind, while delighting in formality, yet holds fast to the good old saying, "Least said, soonest mended." Then there is the conference which is designed to impress, to render uncomfortable, those taking part in it. John Morgan had played the predominant part at many such an interview, his victim having been almost invariably a family scapegrace, a young man whom it was hoped to frighten out of his evil courses before it was too late. But, looking back over his long life, he found no precedent ruling such a discussion as that now about to take place.

The solicitor had been impressed, very much against

his own will and against his own interest, with the probable truth of Glyn's awful suspicion, but he was desirous of hearing the other side, and he was only too ready to be convinced by any argument which the younger doctor would be able to bring forward. During the painful discussion that ensued Peter Whitby had the lawyer's strong moral support for every word he uttered, and this although he and George Glyn were unconscious of it.

But of all the thoughts, the hopes, the fears which filled the astute lawyer's mind and heart—for in this matter John Morgan's heart was very much engaged—Whitby, of course, knew nothing. To him the solicitor belonged already to the Glyn faction, so he came into the room where the other two men were waiting for him, with lowering brow, and a far from conciliatory manner.

The more he thought of it, and he had spent a great many wretched hours thinking the matter over since his conversation with his brother doctor the night before, the more unfair, even treacherous, it seemed that his father should have been consulted without his having been told of Glyn's delusion.

For one wild moment in the watches of a night which had seemed the longest he had ever spent, Peter Whitby had determined that he would himself go and tell Christopher Burdmore of what he was suspected. But he shrank inexpressibly from the ordeal this would prove to himself, and also some remaining touch of good sense made him realize that from every conventional standpoint he could hardly do a more unfair thing by George Glyn. No one knew better than Whitby that a medical man's career might easily be ruined for making a much less serious accusation against a patient

or neighbour. Were Burdmore as innocent as Whitby believed him to be, then he would have much to gain, and the unfortunate Glyn everything to lose, were the matter brought to the test of legal proceedings; and Burdmore—Whitby deep in his heart acknowledged it—was just the man to bring legal proceedings were he sure of winning his case. And so, looking at the question from, as he thought, every angle, Whitby at last came to the conclusion that he could do nothing—nothing, that is, except combat in every way open to him the other doctor's delusion.

“I think you can guess, Mr. Whitby, what is bringing us together this afternoon? George has told me of the very grave suspicion he has conceived concerning a certain patient of his; but he admits quite frankly that you don't agree with him, and that you consider these same suspicions on his part to be——” the lawyer hesitated a moment, and then very deliberately added, “unwarranted by the medical evidence.”

While Mr. Morgan was speaking a look of impatient anger had gathered in the face of the young man whom he was addressing.

Whitby took a step forward; he stood in the full light. “I go further than that!” he exclaimed. “Considerably further, Mr. Morgan! I think George has allowed the matter so to prey on his mind as to become an obsession as well as a delusion.”

He turned and looked straight at Glyn as he spoke; and, as the other said nothing, he again addressed Mr. Morgan, trying this time to speak in a reasoning, reasonable manner.

“Unfortunately George didn't speak to me when he first suspected that Mrs. Burdmore's illness was not

due to a natural cause, and everything that has happened since has assumed to his imagination the importance of an added proof. I don't want to be offensive—not more offensive, that is, than I can help being—but I assure you, sir, if George didn't know me, if I had been staying at any other house than Rosedene, I'm sure it would have taken very little to persuade him that I was in the plot to poison Mrs. Burdmore!"

He laughed angrily, and with some dismay the solicitor looked from the one young man to the other. This was really unfortunate! George Glyn had said nothing implying that they were on such bad terms as this. But even now Glyn kept his temper. He remained silent, but his silence only stung Whitby to fresh anger.

"You see," he said with excitement, "he can't deny it! And then, Mr. Morgan, again most unfortunately for every one concerned, George went and consulted my father! Now my father, as I most stupidly told George some days ago, is himself crazy on this particular subject of secret poisoning. As a young man he was mixed up in an affair of the kind, and ever since he has been convinced that a great deal of poisoning goes on which is neither suspected nor detected. Of course he has encouraged George in his preposterous notion, and, equally of course, he is anxious that I should leave Sunniland for fear I should be in any way involved in the affair. But I've no intention of following out my father's wish in the matter—I'm old enough to judge for myself what I ought to do, and I mean to stay and see the thing out!"

Then at last George Glyn spoke, and his words fell with an ominous sound on the ears of Mary's father.

"I am sure you can understand now, Mr. Morgan, why it is that under the circumstances I can't reconcile it with my professional duty to Mrs. Burdmore to leave Sunniland. I know very well that Whitby would be the first to regret his words were my marriage to be followed, as I feel convinced it would be followed, by Mrs. Burdmore's death. But it would then be too late—too late——"

Whitby shrugged his shoulders. "Too late?" he repeated scornfully. "But why—supposing for a moment that there is anything in your suspicions—should Burdmore wait until he has me alone to deal with before doing this terrible thing? Why should he suppose that I should be so stupidly, wilfully blind? Tell me that, George?"

And then something in the other's face—for Glyn made no reply to the question—filled Peter Whitby with rage, and it was in a voice shaking with anger that he went on. "If you think me so prejudiced in Burdmore's favour that you can't leave the woman in my charge, then I have a proposal to make that will solve every difficulty. I know two or three fellows who would be only too pleased to come down here for a month. Let one of them be taken into our confidence with regard to this ——" he gulped down the adjective he would fain have used, and only said the word "suspicion."

"I'm afraid we can't let you do that," the solicitor interposed quietly, "your proposal is very well meant, no doubt, but you would be doing a very ill turn to the man you seem to regard as your friend—I allude, of course, to Mr. Burdmore—if you brought a stranger, at this stage, into the matter. The only person whom I think it might be reasonable to consult is my own

doctor, I mean Locke, of Horsham. Locke is already in the neighbourhood; that he should be called in is natural. Why not allow George to tell Mr. Burdmore that he doesn't feel that he can leave so perplexing a case in your hands alone, and that he would like Locke to see Mrs. Burdmore from time to time? That would be, believe me, a wise solution, and the slur on you, Mr. Whitby, would be very slight!" the speaker smiled.

"Burdmore would very soon guess what we were up to," said Whitby sullenly; "he's not the fool Glyn takes him to be."

A gleam came into the solicitor's eyes. This was what he had been waiting for. Whitby's advocacy of the Burdmores had left him unmoved, unconvinced,—indeed, he scarcely cared which of the two men before him was right. The important thing to his mind was that the situation should be dealt with in a wise, nay more, in a worldly wise, manner, and unless he were very much mistaken the intervention of Locke—the elderly doctor who had been the medical attendant at The Haven for many years—would certainly put an end to any such scheme as that which Glyn believed Mrs. Burdmore's husband had in his mind.

"If Mr. Whitby is right," he said, turning to Glyn, "then our problem is solved!"

Glyn and Whitby both looked at him in some perplexity. "I confess I don't understand what you mean," said Glyn slowly, but Whitby by now was smiling rather sardonically.

"I see what you mean quite well," he said quickly. "You mean that if Burdmore is innocent he won't care,—in fact he won't mind how many doctors we bring on the scene. On the other hand, if he's a treacherous,

cold-blooded poisoner, who is only waiting to get George out of the way in order to put an end to his wife—then the intervention of Locke would be a serious complication, and would act exactly”—he nodded to Glyn—“as my father’s action acted in the case of Mrs. Underwyke.”

“Yes!” cried Glyn, and for the first time his voice, vibrating with feeling, showed how great an ordeal he was going through, “you’re right, Whitby! I quite admit that the intervention of Locke would almost certainly put an end to Burdmore’s scheme. But what would happen then? Mary and I would come back to Rosedene and find Lilywood empty—the birds flown. Then in three months, in six months, in a year, perhaps, there would happen to me the awful thing that happened to your father. I should find out that Mrs. Burdmore had been done to death elsewhere! Unfortunately for me I’ve a tenderer conscience than your father seems to have had. I should never lift up my head again if that happened. I should feel myself that woman’s murderer as surely as if I’d administered the poison to her myself, and I swear I’d bring Burdmore to book!”

The two young men looked at one another with angry contempt and an equal indignation.

“Look here,” said Mr. Morgan, authoritatively, “this won’t do, George. Even you yourself admitted to me that you had very little proof, if any, to go upon, and now you speak as if the man you thought so well of a short time ago, and his sister, Miss Burdmore, whom you certainly began by liking and respecting, were already convicted murderers! Believe me, you’d better leave the matter, I won’t say to Mr. Whitby here, but to me. Whether we take Locke into our confidence or not, I assure you that I can make it well-nigh impos-

sible for the Burdmores to leave Sunniland till your return."

As the face of the man he addressed showed no sign of acquiescence, he added in a very different tone, and with far more emotion than he had betrayed at either the previous or present interview, "There's one person whose interests in this matter we have all neglected. That person is my daughter Mary. You have no right, George, unless, of course, the matter is one of absolute necessity, to cause her the mortification and pain of a postponement which could not be explained to any of her friends."

It was the last weapon in the lawyer's armoury, and after he had sped it home he looked away from the man to whom he had spoken, and began rather nervously arranging some papers on the table before him. But again he turned, and again spoke, very seriously, "I fear I must add that if a man is as great a rascal as you apparently think this Christopher Burdmore to be, English law has as yet devised no way of heading him off any crime he may choose to commit."

And then Glyn was beset on another side.

"Listen, George," said Whitby, "I would like to add something to what Mr. Morgan has just said. I had hoped that I need not bring myself—still less Miss Burdmore into this. But now I will tell you both something that may perhaps modify your view. There is a mystery at Lilywood, and it accounts for some of the things you thought so strange; but I give you my word of honour that this secret has no connection with Mrs. Burdmore; it concerns Miss Burdmore, and Miss Burdmore alone. Even in saying so much I am betraying a sacred confidence."

George Glyn looked at the young man very steadily. What Peter Whitby had just said surprised him very much. Was it conceivable after all that he, Glyn, had made a mistake? He recognized the truth of what Mr. Morgan had just said. Mary had a right to be considered. Their marriage could not be postponed for ever. Some time sooner or later he would have to leave Sunniland.

He turned and faced his future father-in-law. "Very well," he said, "if you're willing to take the responsibility, Mr. Morgan, I'll do as you wish. But in that case I must make one stipulation,—that is that you yourself will undertake to see Christopher Burdmore on my wedding day, and tell him of the arrangements I have made concerning Locke. I, of course, also trust to your promise that you'll prevent the Burdmores leaving Sunniland till my return. I don't suppose," he turned to Whitby, "that you can see any serious objection to this?"

"I do object to it!" exclaimed Whitby. "I think you're putting a grave insult on a man whom I like and respect, and on a woman"—his lips quivered—"for whom I have the greatest regard. But of course I'm powerless in the matter. This extraordinary notion has so taken hold of you that nothing I could say would shake your belief. My only comfort is that I feel quite convinced that Locke will not only agree with me, but will end by shaking this belief of yours. I wish I were as sure of Heaven as I am that you will live to be ashamed of your suspicion!" And then he flung himself out of the room.

"I think," said Mr. Morgan quietly, "that our young friend will do the work for us, George. He will never be able to prevent those people knowing of what

they are suspected. He is too intimate with the sister, even if not with the brother, to keep his knowledge to himself. But I can't help admitting, my dear fellow, that your decision has relieved my mind of a great weight. As far as I can see, the postponement of your marriage would not have been a real solution."

"It's because I know that what you say is true that I have consented to do as you wish," said Glyn slowly; but he was now racked with miserable doubt as to whether he had been right after all.

CHAPTER XXXII

THERE is a curiously lulling quality in the words "too late." George Glyn now knew that the time for struggle was over. In a sense he had yielded his conscience into another's keeping, and in his heart he was well aware that concerning one matter he could be easy, for John Morgan, like most lawyers, was always better than his word; caution prompted him to promise little, but conscience, or some other less stern quality, made his performance invariably better than his promise.

Meanwhile, Glyn had every excuse for not going to Lilywood, and for not seeing anything of the Burdmores, for his wedding day was now drawing very near, and he was introducing Peter Whitby, in his own careful, systematic fashion, to each of the patients scattered over his large and straggling practice.

The ill terms on which he and Whitby now found themselves formed a bitter drop in Glyn's cup. Before strangers they were in duty bound to affect a certain cordiality of manner, but when they were not actually engaged in professional work together Whitby chose to treat Glyn as one who had done him a cruel injury; and the older doctor was, of course, quite unaware that the young man had other and far better reasons than any quarrel with himself to look as he now always did look—that is, moody, unhappy, and at odds with the world.

Whitby also, during these apparently well-filled monotonous days, tried to avoid Lilywood, but something seemed to be ever leading him thither, and the more he was there the more amazing and preposterous to him appeared George Glyn's delusion.

Mrs. Burdmore was now well on her way to complete convalescence; she lived mostly in her own bedroom, but that, or so Whitby was convinced, she did from choice. As for Cynthia Burdmore, she seemed to have forgotten her amazing confidence; she never alluded to their singular conversation, and her manner to Whitby was quite unchanged—gentle, intimate, trusting as ever. Unfortunately he, unlike her, could not disguise his feelings, and almost at once Christopher Burdmore had guessed that something was very wrong with the young man.

"What's the matter with Whitby, Cynthia?" he asked her uneasily, "he's quite changed in the last two or three days! Can you account for it?"

There was a long pause, and then, "Yes, I can account for it," Cynthia spoke reluctantly. "But it's nothing that you need worry about, Chris; it's—it's something personal——" she hesitated, and then added the words, "to himself."

Burdmore, relieved, gave her a quick look, but she met his rather mocking glance steadily; then her eyes dropped, and her face became, as it always did when she was moved, a deep, dusky red.

"All right!" he said, "I think I understand. But still, I shouldn't have chosen this moment to upset him if I'd been you."

"He's not upset—not in any way that need matter to you." There was angry protest in her tone, and she added, her voice vibrating with emotion, "Peter Whitby

is the best friend we've had for many a long day, Chris!"

To Cynthia the days, nay the hours, were flying by with terrible speed. She had never fully recovered from the illness induced by the shock she had suffered the night Burdmore had been in London, and though she was not afraid of falling away from the standard of self-command and duplicity to which Chris had trained her, she dreaded with a great dread what she knew the early August days would bring her.

Whitby did not waste many thoughts on George Glyn and his delusion. He had written his father a brief note quietly refusing to do what was required of him. An intimate knowledge of the man to whom he was writing had made him so word the letter as to make Franklin Whitby believe that the matter had now passed out of both the doctors' hands into those of John Morgan. But once he had written his letter, he had dismissed his father from his mind, and every spare moment his heart and imagination were again filled with the image of Cynthia. She had told him at once too much and too little of her secret, and yet something in her manner forbade him to ask her to tell him more. He was wretched when away from Lilywood and miserable when there.

It was fortunate for Whitby that the greater part of each day of that last week was taken up, for the first time since he had come to Sunniland, with real work. Each day saw the circle of the cases handed over to him by George Glyn become wider and more interesting. Little by little his professional instincts awoke, and he grew reluctantly absorbed in the patients he was beginning to attend.

As for Mr. Morgan, he was fairly satisfied with the way things had turned out. George Glyn's sudden surrender was an unexpected piece of good fortune. If Burdmore were as clever as the lawyer took him to be, there was little doubt that he would be able to stop what he qualified to himself as "the villain's little game" without anything in the nature of a scene, or even of an explanation.

The French equivalent of our proverb that if you give a rascal rope enough he will end by hanging himself runs rather differently from the English version, for it is to the effect that in one's own interest it is always well to let a rascal go and be hung elsewhere than in your own neighbourhood! In this matter, John Morgan, though a typical Englishman, was at one with the French proverb-maker. He knew that it passeth the wit of man to prevent certain crimes—but he saw no reason why, if a crime were to be committed, it should take place within what happened to be his own intimate circle. He also held the view that if a woman marries a scoundrel there's no help for her, save, of course, through the narrow portals of the Divorce Court. If Christopher Burdmore were really a cunning, unscrupulous criminal he would probably succeed, if not sooner, then later, in doing away with his rich, sickly wife; but Mr. Morgan was determined to prevent any tragedy of the kind taking place at Sunniland.

So relieved did he feel at the way things had turned out that he even dropped a hint to his wife. He gave her no clue as to what the trouble had been, but he said enough to make her understand that there had been a serious hitch in the matter of Mary's marriage. Having said so much, he had to promise

that, once the wedding-day had come and gone, he would tell her all about it. To the telling of his tale the solicitor looked forward with a certain grim amusement. Mrs. Morgan was one of those happy women who do not believe that misfortunes of a certain nature can ever come their way. It would be gratifying to shake that fond belief.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was *à propos* of Mrs. Burdmore, who, if so constantly in the minds of the three men about them, was for the moment forgotten both by Mrs. Morgan and her younger daughter, that Jenny and her mother fell out on the very eve of Mary's marriage day.

Everything was ready for the morrow. Mrs. Morgan's sister and her husband, had taken themselves off to London, and intended to be absent till the morrow, showing a discretion for which Mr. Morgan, at any rate, felt grateful.

Suddenly Mrs. Morgan came into the room where her husband and younger daughter were sitting rather disconsolately doing nothing, he thinking quietly of his coming interview with Christopher Burdmore, she of the strained relations which neither George nor Peter was able to conceal from Jenny and Mary, whatever they might do from others.

"I can't find my key-basket," she said, addressing her daughter, and speaking in a more disturbed tone than she was wont to speak. I've looked everywhere, but it's gone from the place I put it last—I mean on the top of the drawers in your father's dressing-room!"

Jenny looked up guiltily.

"Oh, mother, I'm so sorry! Your key-basket is at Lilywood. You know, I was there for a minute yesterday. Mrs. Burdmore lost the key of her box—the box in which she kept the gown she means to wear to-

morrow. She was awfully upset, and so I suggested that I should send her down your key-basket! I know you hardly ever want it."

"You'd no business to do such a thing!" Mrs. Morgan spoke very sharply; and Jenny's father, to her chagrin, chimed in, "A key is like a cheque-book, Jenny; it's not a thing that ought to be left about, or lent about."

He added, deliberately, "We know very little of the Burdmores, and they're certainly not the kind of people to whom you ought to have taken any of your mother's keys without first asking her permission."

"Now, Jenny, my dear, you must put on your hat and go down and fetch them at once." Mrs. Morgan spoke in a tone—one very rarely used by her—which her children seldom disobeyed.

Jenny felt hurt and injured. It seemed hard that on the very day before Mary's wedding her mother should speak to her like that! As to what her father had said, she did not pay much attention to it. Mr. Morgan was given to what his children irreverently styled "laying down the law," the law, too, taken in its narrowest sense. It was ridiculous, or so thought Jenny, to compare a key and a cheque-book!

As for the Burdmores, though Jenny had her private reasons for not liking Christopher Burdmore, there was certainly no reason why any number of keys should not be lent to the inmates of Lilywood. They weren't burglars or thieves. She was aware that the idea of lending her mother's key-basket had been her own suggestion, a suggestion which had only been languidly welcomed by the now convalescent Mrs. Burdmore. Finding the little covered basket in its usual place, the girl had packed it up, and sent it down to Lilywood

with a note without consulting any one; and the parcel had been handed, so the servant entrusted with it had reported to her, to Mrs. Muxlow, the charwoman. Jenny, in the breathless hurry of preparation with which the last few days had been filled, had forgotten all about the matter.

So it was that now she put on her hat and went down the hill very reluctantly. She did not feel in the mood to see either Christopher Burdmore or his sister, even less was she inclined to waste an hour in listening to Mrs. Burdmore's egotistical chatter about herself.

The gate was unlocked by the master of the house, and he greeted the young girl with a jovial cordiality which was, though Jenny did not now believe it, natural to the man.

"Come to see the missis? Well, that's very nice of you, Miss Jenny! She's taking a tremendous interest in your sister's wedding, and now you'll be able to tell her all the latest details."

Jenny Morgan has since sometimes wondered whether some hidden previsionary instinct made her refrain from telling Christopher Burdmore why she had come, on that particular afternoon, when her place should have been at home, to pay an unexpected call on his wife. At the time, her one desire was to cut her conversation with Burdmore as short as possible; she felt for him the mixture of dislike and contempt which an honest person feels for one whom they have discovered to be singularly double-faced—but she of course tried to conceal her feeling, without much success.

"What's the matter with the little cat?" he muttered to himself, as he saw her disappear up the staircase leading to his wife's room. "She's sore at our having stolen Whitby from her—that's what it is! Stay as

long as you can," he called out, "Cynthia's had to go over to Boxford."

But Jenny had already made up her mind that she would only stay a very little while with Mrs. Burdmore. There were still a thousand and one things to be done at home. She would get the key-basket, and then go back at once.

When on the upper storey, she burst, with a perfunctory knock, into Mrs. Burdmore's room. The woman she had come to see was sitting up, near the window; she held—an unusual circumstance—a book in her hand, but as Jenny opened the door she started violently, her chair made a hard grating sound, and the book dropped on the floor.

"Oh, Jenny," she moaned, "how you frightened me! Why did you come in like that?"

"I'm so sorry!" Jenny spoke penitently. She moved softly, quietly across the shadowed room. The blinds were down, and the cool half-darkness was refreshing after the heat outside.

Mrs. Burdmore was sitting very upright, her hands clasped loosely together on her lap. She looked away from her visitor, staring before her in a purposeless manner.

"Why, you're not so well!" exclaimed the girl with concern, "you look quite ill again, Mrs. Burdmore."

"Don't be foolish!" Mrs. Burdmore spoke in a short, rather angry tone, very unlike the querulous tone she generally adopted when speaking to her favourite visitor, "I'm not ill again; I—I'm—quite well."

But Jenny looked at her with dismay. How odd as well as ill she looked! "Poor Louisa" sat in a curiously strained position, every now and again moistening her dry lips with her tongue. There was a strange gleam in her

eyes, a look Jenny had never seen there. Her air of rather fussy self-importance had gone; to the eyes of her young visitor she looked mortally stricken.

"But, indeed, you don't look at all well," the girl repeated. "Has anything happened?" Jenny lowered her voice, "Has Cynthia been unkind to you?"

Mrs. Burdmore looked at Jenny doubtfully; her lips quivered.

"Come nearer," she said, "I want to ask you something." In a whisper she asked, "Did you leave them both downstairs? All to-day I seem to have heard steps creeping up to my door, and then going away again, but perhaps it was only my fancy. Did either of them say anything about *me*? Tell me the truth, girl," and she looked at Jenny with a fixed, inquiring stare.

Jenny felt really frightened; she had seen Mrs. Burdmore in many odd moods—but never in such a mood as this. The very unpleasant suspicion came to her that the features in the sick woman's case which had so puzzled George Glyn might have, after all, a simple if dreadful explanation. Was it possible that the poor woman who was looking at her so strangely was insane? Jenny knew very little of madness, but she was aware that insanity takes many strange forms. Mrs. Burdmore's pale sunken eyes were full of light; her usually apathetic face looked strained and tense.

"Cynthia is out," said Jenny, in a low troubled tone. "Mr. Burdmore only mentioned you to say that you were looking forward to Mary's wedding."

"Mary's wedding?" repeated Mrs. Burdmore, in a bewildered tone, "I'd forgotten all about that—and yet it's to-morrow, isn't it?"

Jenny's fear, her half-formed suspicion, became intensified a hundred-fold.

"Yes, it's to-morrow," she said nervously, "and I hope, Mrs. Burdmore, that you found that one of our keys opened your box all right. In fact that's why I'm here now ; mother wants her key-basket."

"But haven't you had it? I sent it you back this morning." Mrs. Burdmore stood up, and actually wrung her hands. "I gave it to Mrs. Muxlow, and she promised me, she gave me her word that *they* would not know of it. I did it up myself, and addressed it to *you*." A look of agonized terror had come over her face.

"I expect it's all right," said Jenny, soothingly, "so many parcels have been coming to the house all day long that one may easily have been overlooked. I'm sure Mrs. Muxlow did what you wished ; she's a very nice woman, and knows all our servants so well."

"She's always been kind to me," muttered Mrs. Burdmore, "and so I gave her a sovereign."

"A sovereign? That seems a good deal to have given her for doing such a little thing as that!"

She looked longingly at the door.

"Jenny—don't leave me yet! Stay with me as long as you can? I've been very lonely all this week—even Chris," her voice faltered, "has not bothered about me much. You've always thought he cared for me, haven't you, Jenny?"

"Yes—of course I have," said Jenny honestly. "I'm sure Mr. Burdmore is devoted to you."

The other shook her head, and again there came over her face a strained, vacant look.

"I want to go to bed," she said suddenly. "Will you help me to undress, Jenny?"

Pity took the place of fear in Jenny's heart ; she was not naturally nervous or particularly imaginative.

"Of course I will stay," she said cheerfully, "and help you to get into bed. Then don't you think I'd better ask Mr. Whitby to come and see you?"

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Burdmore, angrily, "No! no! no! I won't see young Whitby. He's Cynthia's friend! He hates me! He believes everything she tells him—I like Dr. Glyn much better." She looked imploringly at Jenny, "I wouldn't mind seeing Dr. Glyn——"

"Oh, but you can't do that," said the girl decidedly. "You see George has handed over all his cases to Mr. Whitby, and then—then to-morrow is George's wedding day. I don't think I can ask him to come and see you now, to-day."

The sick woman was standing leaning against one of the carved posts of the bed, and again it struck Jenny how terribly ill she was looking, how changed she had become even in the few hours since she had last seen her.

"Before I go to bed," said Mrs. Burdmore, suddenly, "I want to show you how well I can walk. They won't let me go downstairs, but last night, when the house was still, I walked—at first a few steps, then more and more; everything was shut and barred or I should have escaped."

She stepped forward and began tottering about the room aimlessly. Jenny Morgan looked at her with increasing pity and concern.

At last she came back to the bedside, and there, very carefully and tenderly, Jenny Morgan helped the unhappy woman to undress. It was a long business, for the other gave her no help; silent at last, she stared helplessly before her, as if she saw some vision of dread denied to her companion.

Still with that absorbed, strained look of vacancy

and fear, Mrs. Burdmore lay stretched out in bed. Jenny's hand was held loosely in hers, but every time the girl tried gently to withdraw it, she felt the other's fingers tighten round hers; it was an eerie, disagreeable sensation, for there was strength, something masterful and purposeful, in the clutch of the thin, bony hand.

"Jenny," whispered the sick woman suddenly, "put your face nearer to mine, I want to ask you something. Do you think it wrong to pray to the dead? I don't mean to the saints, as Romanists do, but to those we've known, who've died and left us?"

"I don't understand what you mean," said Jenny, troubled. She looked round her fearfully; her nerve was leaving her. "Dead people can no longer hear us, Mrs. Burdmore——"

"Ah, don't say that!" cried the other, "I can't bear you to say that, Jenny! Why, all to-day I've been praying to my mother—my poor, dead mother, who loved me so and never would see me hurt,—and at times it seemed as if she was quite close to me. But for that I should have gone mad, Jenny, quite mad to-day—to-day has seemed so long. I think she sent you," she went on, "for ever since you've been here I've felt comforted."

"But I must go away now, dear Mrs. Burdmore, I must indeed—they're wanting me at home."

In the still, sunny room Jenny felt thrilled with mortal fear. It was as if another soul, another human entity, had entered into possession of the woman over whom she was bending. Again she tried to draw away her hand, but Mrs. Burdmore only gripped her fingers the closer.

"I shan't let you go!" whispered the recumbent

woman, "not till you promise me something! Will you promise to say nothing to *them*—nothing, I mean, about me?"

Jenny hesitated. "Do you mean to my people?" she asked uncomfortably.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Burdmore, quickly, "I don't mean your father and mother—they're kind and good, like you."

"You mean to Mr. Burdmore and his sister?"

"Yes," said the sick woman, "I want you to promise me, Jenny, not to speak of me to them—at all." Again she tightened her hold on the other's hand—tightened it till it hurt. "I won't let you go till you've promised me! Nay, that's not enough—you must swear not to speak of me. I want them to forget me—to-day."

"But I never have spoken of you to them," said Jenny, earnestly, "I never *do* speak of you, Mrs. Burdmore. I know you don't like your sister-in-law, though I ought to tell you that she's never spoken unkindly of you."

Mrs. Burdmore suddenly sat up in her bed.

"Listen," she whispered, "I should like to tell you something, Jenny Morgan—something I found out last night—but I dare not; they might kill you if they thought you knew."

"No, no, don't tell me," said Jenny, hastily.

With young imprudence she added, "If you're really frightened, if they're really unkind to you, you must tell father; father will help you. I'll manage so that you can see him to-morrow, after the wedding." She had just remembered, in a flash, the conversation she had overheard,—the strange, cold way in which both the brother and sister had spoken of "Louisa" that

morning when she had been so unwilling an eaves-dropper.

Mrs. Burdmore looked at her doubtfully.

"Yes," she whispered, "I might do that. But go away now, child; if you stay I feel I must tell you—and I am afraid to tell you——"

Jenny hesitated. She wondered whether she ought to leave the poor woman. But Mrs. Burdmore shut her eyes, she withdrew her hand from Jenny's.

Very quietly the girl left the room and went downstairs.

Christopher Burdmore was not in the studio; she saw him on the balcony, smoking. He nodded and waved his hand as she swiftly passed out of his sight, letting herself through the door and then through the gate.

The scene had shaken Jenny's nerve, and Mrs. Burdmore had so far infected her with her own mysterious dread that she had felt no temptation to break her promise, and speak, as perhaps an older woman than Jenny would have felt it her duty to do, to Christopher Burdmore of his wife's strange condition.

But as she walked slowly away from Lilywood, Jenny could not help debating with herself as to whether she ought not to tell George Glyn of his patient's condition. She knew that certain human beings, without being dangerously mad, are subject to delusions; if this were true of Mrs. Burdmore, it would explain her husband's and her sister-in-law's curious unwillingness that she should be encouraged to come downstairs, take part in their daily life, be seen by the little world of Lilywood. True, this was the first time Jenny had ever seen the invalid in the state in which she had found her to-day, but then, after all, the Burdmores had only been at Lilywood a few weeks. She

knew that the case from the first had puzzled George Glyn—this, no doubt, was the solution to which he had no clue.

As she drew near Rosedene Jenny's steps slackened. She looked over the gate, and as if in answer to her wish she saw Peter Whitby standing in the garden path. He was in the mood when any company seemed better than his own, and on seeing the girl he hurried towards her.

"May I come with you?" he asked eagerly. "I'll make myself so useful, Miss Jenny!"

And then, when he had joined her, as they journeyed up the hill side by side, Jenny told him of her curious interview with Mrs. Burdmore. She did not choose her words, but spoke with quick, breathless haste.

"I did suggest asking you to come and see her," she concluded, "but she didn't seem to think you could do her any good."

Peter Whitby listened attentively to all that the girl told him. She was evidently deeply moved, and her voice had trembled with pity; her companion told himself that emotion became Jenny Morgan more than it becomes most women.

"No, I don't suppose I could really do her any good," he said, coolly. "I'm not a bit surprised at what you tell me. Mrs. Burdmore's not mad—that's giving her type of malady far too grand a name! She's a selfish, silly, hysterical woman, Miss Jenny, and though she would be very angry if she heard me tell you so, she's by no means a unique specimen. I'm sorry to be so ungallant to your sex."

"Men can be very selfish and silly, too," said Jenny, with some spirit.

"Not as bad as that!" he said, shaking his head

"I grant you her dislike to—to her sister-in-law is almost insane, and I've been waiting for her to turn against her husband. Those sort of cases always end by turning against the people who are kindest to them, and whom they have the most reason to love."

"But can nothing be done?" asked Jenny.

The deep impression made on her by the sick woman's evident agony and distress of mind remained vividly present to her, though Whitby's words affected her to a certain extent.

"No, nothing can be done," said the young man decidedly. "If Mrs. Burdmore were sent away to a nursing home, and surrounded by people who were perfectly indifferent to her, and to what we may call her tantrums, she might possibly get well again, but even you must admit she would always be a narrow-minded, jealous, and disagreeable human being."

"Perhaps that's true," said Jenny reluctantly.

"Of course it's true!" he exclaimed. "Take what happened to-day—I mean to you. Most people would have remembered that to-morrow will be your sister's wedding-day, and would at least have made an effort to sympathize. But the moment Mrs. Burdmore saw you she burst out into complaints, and managed—for you're quite upset and unlike yourself, Miss Jenny—to frighten and depress you."

"Yes," admitted Jenny, "she did frighten me—horribly, Mr. Whitby."

He smiled at her very kindly.

"You must try and forget all about the poor woman till the day after to-morrow. Although she may not have admitted it, I'm sure you cheered her up and took her out of herself. I'll look after her myself at the wedding, for I'm sure she'll be there."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE long tiring day had come to an end. Everything was ready for the morrow, even to Mary's wedding-dress, now laid out on the bed of the best spare-bedroom.

Mr. and Mrs. Morgan and their two daughters were sitting together after dinner. Jenny was holding her sister's hand: now and again she said something in a cheerful, matter-of-fact tone, but she felt miserable; none of these four people who loved one another so well were happy or at ease.

Mrs. Morgan was vaguely aware that the matter of which her husband had told her was still troubling him, and he was not at ease. Jenny suspected a quarrel between Glyn and Whitby—in fact, she knew that the two men were scarcely on speaking terms; and the knowledge pained her, unreasonably.

Mary felt more oppressed than either her mother or sister, for she knew that George was still quite unlike himself, and she still had no clue to his distress.

Suddenly John Morgan got up. "I think I'll go down the hill," he said, "and sit with George and Whitby a bit."

Mary came close to her father; she looked pleadingly at her mother. "I wonder," she said irresolutely, "whether it would be odd, or—or wrong for me to go with you, father?"

"It wouldn't be wrong," he said doubtfully, "but I'm afraid your young friend Whitby would think it

rather strange. However, why shouldn't you have your way this last time? Come if you like, child—and Jenny can come too."

Mrs. Morgan looked up, surprised; her husband had ever been a stickler for the proprieties.

But if the father had had any doubt, he felt justified when he saw the relief with which the two young men welcomed their unexpected visitors.

Whitby and Glyn had been sitting silent, each with a book which he made a pretence of reading. Jenny was right, the two were still scarcely on speaking terms—not a pleasant state of things between a prospective bridegroom and his best man.

The whole party established themselves on the verandah, the two lovers sitting side by side, Jenny and Peter Whitby close to the wooden balustrade, and Mr. Morgan between the two groups.

It was Mr. Morgan's suggestion that the electric light should be extinguished. "It's not necessary," he said rather drily, "that every one passing along the road should see us just as if we were a scene in a play. Besides, the moon is very bright to-night—one could almost read by this light."

A softening calm fell on them all. Glyn put out his thin nervous hand and clasped Mary's soft kind palm with an almost painful grip. He wished with an intense voiceless longing that he had laid his problem before her, and left it to her to decide. He knew well that she would never have pressed him to run away from what he believed to be his duty. Why, if he had only thought of it before and taken him into his confidence they might have been married quietly, and spent their honeymoon in their own home, in the good old-world way. But now it was too late. Too late. . . .

In Peter Whitby's present mood Jenny Morgan was a peculiarly agreeable companion. She knew nothing, and apparently she suspected nothing. The only happy hours Whitby had spent that day had been in the Morgans' house; he had enjoyed being made useful by Mrs. Morgan and her younger daughter, and he had dreaded the long dull evening with George Glyn which was to follow.

It was Peter Whitby who first saw something moving in the road—the road which in the bright moonlight looked like the still current of a placid river rather than a strip of solid earth. Stretching towards Lilywood the winding ribbon took a sharp bend. It was at the bend that he had seen a strange object suddenly emerge, and he had watched it curiously for some moments before he spoke. But at last—

“There's something so odd coming along the road!” he exclaimed. “Do look at it, Mr. Morgan—I've been watching it for some time, and wondering what it can be. It's too large for a dog, and it certainly isn't a man. It goes along zig-zagging, and now and then turns over, or seems to crouch down in the road—then picks itself up, and goes on a few steps quite steadily.”

Mr. Morgan put on his eye-glass. “I don't see anything,” he said, and then, “Yes, I do! I think—I'm sure—it's a woman!”

He walked across the moonlit floor to the edge of the verandah, and looked out fixedly for a few moments, then came back to where Whitby was sitting.

“I'm afraid,” he said, in a low voice, “I'm afraid that it's what I've never seen in Sunniland before, that is, a drunken woman.”

"Of course it is! How stupid of me!" Whitby looked at the speaker with a rather unwilling admiration. What a clever old chap the solicitor was! He had tumbled to the truth at once. But what was happening now? The poor woman whose condition Mr. Morgan had diagnosed so quickly was close to the gate of Rosedene. She was fumbling with the easy catch.

"Why, who's there—trying to get in?" Jenny's voice rang out.

Whitby jumped to his feet. "I'll go and get rid of her quietly," he murmured. "Don't any of you move."

But John Morgan gripped his arm.

"Wait!" he said, authoritatively; "I made a mistake just now—that woman by the gate is not drunk."

Then in a voice in which sharp annoyance struggled with baffled curiosity, "Ah, we can't see anything now!" for Whitby, without realizing what he was doing, had turned on the electric light, and at once the veil of night thickened, became impenetrable. At the same moment there rose a lamentable cry on the still air.

George Glyn and Mary, still hand in hand, stood up, and on hearing the cry, Glyn, in horror-struck tones, exclaimed, "It's Mrs. Burdmore! It's Mrs. Burdmore, Mr. Morgan!"

Peter Whitby and Jenny Morgan rushed down the few steps leading to the path and so to the gate. A moment later they reappeared, half-carrying, half-pushing, the poor woman up the steps.

At last she stood—a figure at once grotesque and tragic—in their midst, or rather set as in a frame before them all, for she had put out her hand and clasped the pillar nearest to her.

Blinking in the bright light, she looked about her with bewilderment. Her long white silk dressing-gown

was soiled with dust; her scanty hair had become unbound. Suddenly she saw Glyn, and, tottering forward, clutched him by the arm.

"Whitby," he said sharply, "get some brandy. You'll find the tantalus in my study. She's utterly exhausted, and if you don't look out she'll be fainting in a minute."

Glyn then put his arm round her, and placed her in a chair.

"You won't let them get me," she said, shivering; "I was so afraid you'd be out, and that I should have to hide myself in the garden. I've been waiting all day—such a long, long day. Then at last they went out; they always do go out after dinner. They were very unkind to me, Dr. Glyn, they left me alone a great deal; even Chris was unkind in that way."

A strained silence had fallen on the group of people standing round her. No one spoke but the woman herself.

"You see, I'm not his wife," she looked round as if challenging their already strained attention. "Cynthia is his wife. She's not his sister. That was all pretence."

Whitby was now at Glyn's elbow; he handed him a glass.

"Drink this," Glyn said firmly, "and don't try to speak till you've rested for a while, Mrs. Burdmore."

"Oh! but I must speak." The poor soul showed a touch of her old irritability and obstinacy. She sat up in her chair with a pitiful attempt at dignity, and as her strength revived she seemed to become aware of her strange dishevelled condition. Her hand went up uncertainly to her head; she tried to rearrange her hair.

"I found it out last night," she spoke in a more

collected, a more matter-of-fact tone. "I was lying awake, and I suddenly thought of something I could do with all those keys. I knew exactly where Cynthia kept her box of secret things, and I wanted to see what was in it. It was a risk; she might have waked up, but I knew she had taken a sleeping draught. I always meant to find out what she kept in that box. One morning, not very long ago Chris tried to make her burn the things in it. I heard them talking about it—early in the morning, downstairs. I found far more than I looked for, but I've only brought one thing with me."

Her hand began fumbling blindly about her long draggled skirt.

"It's in my petticoat pocket; I hid it there, because I thought if she caught me, and knew that I had it, she'd kill me. But now I can't find it," she muttered feebly.

Mr. Morgan made a quick sign to his elder daughter, and it was Mary's reluctant hand which at last found and produced the only thing in Mrs. Burdmore's pocket. It was a newspaper cutting, folded into a very small compass.

Mrs. Burdmore held out her hand for it, took it, and then dropped it on to the floor.

"Oh, the shame of it!" she muttered, "the horrible shame!"

Glyn picked up what she had dropped.

"Would you like us to read it?" he said, diffidently.

"Yes," she said; "I brought it for you to read, Dr. Glyn."

Glyn hesitated, then handed it to John Morgan, and together the solicitor and Peter Whitby read it, holding the long thin slip of print between them. They read it silently, and it took the younger man some moments to understand its significance.

It was a cutting from a newspaper printed in English, but bearing, at any rate to John Morgan's practised eye, unmistakable proof of not having been published anywhere in England. The title of the paper—Mr. Morgan judged it to be an Australian name—ran across the top of the column, and had been carefully preserved, but the date had been cut out.

Headed "A Fashionable Marriage," the matter consisted of an account, ill-written, vulgarly familiar in its turn of phrase, of a wedding which had just taken place in a small colonial township. The high contracting parties—so the writer termed them—were related, for the bride, Miss Cynthia Burdmore, was stated to be the second cousin of Dr. Christopher Burdmore, the bridegroom. The esteem in which the young lady was held by the people to whom she had lately been lady help was shown by the fact that her employers had given a reception in honour of the marriage.

The rest of the column consisted of a verbatim report of the speech delivered at the wedding breakfast by the bridegroom, and as Whitby looked at the ill-printed words, the flowing periods, the well-turned if rather pompous phrases, brought up before him the masterful, buoyant personality of the man whom so short a time before he had been proud to call his friend.

He was still staring down at it, when there came the sound of the click caused by the opening of the garden gate.

A moment later a strangled cry broke from the lips of the woman sitting in their midst. Glyn looked up, John Morgan and Whitby turned round, and as he turned the solicitor crushed the piece of paper he held in his hand and thrust it into his breast pocket.

watchful, yet panting a little, as if he had walked very quickly. Mr. Morgan noticed that his evening pumps were wet from the dew on the grass growing by the roadside ; he had evidently kept off the dry white road.

Burdmore looked inquiringly from one to the other of the silent people before him.

"We missed Louisa," he began, in his usual confident, cheery voice, "and I made sure she had come down here."

As no one spoke, he added, but the assurance had suddenly gone out of his voice, "And now, Louisa, are you ready to come home?"

He stared at the woman as if willing her to obey him.

She half rose from her chair, then sank back again.

"Oh, Chris!" she wailed, "Oh, Chris—I know everything—everything! I opened Cynthia's box. I—I found the account of your—your wedding! How could you be so wicked and so unkind? How could you treat me so. Why did you do it?"

And then there came an extraordinary change—which perhaps only John Morgan noticed—over the man whom they were all arraigning ; it was a look of relief—of exultant, unmistakable relief.

Chris Burdmore stepped deliberately across to where the woman was sitting ; he even put out his large hand, and rested it a moment on her frail shoulder.

"Louisa!" he exclaimed, in a subdued, pathetic voice, "I've been a scoundrel! I can but humbly beg your pardon. I was tempted, and I fell."

"If it was money you wanted," she whispered, sobbing with long-drawn painful breaths, "I would have

given you money—indeed I would, Chris! Even now I can't believe it's true that you deceived me so, and that I'm not your—your wife." She seemed to have forgotten those who were looking on at the grotesque, horrible little scene. All the stored-up, self-respecting ideals of "poor Louisa's" hard-bitten Yorkshire forebears were uttering a last protest against the misfortune which had befallen her.

"This painful scene must end," said Burdmore. He glanced round and saw that his way to the steps was clear.

"Good-bye, Louisa," he went on solemnly. "Try to forget you ever met the wretched, unhappy man to whom you were so kind. And above all," he concluded, "never blame yourself, Louisa! I assume all responsibility for what we did."

While he was speaking, her sobs gradually lessened; she was looking up at him with a yearning, submissive look, tears rolling slowly down her face. He took a handkerchief out of his dress coat pocket and handed it to her. As he did so something fell out of it, and bounded along the floor.

"Why, that's my ruby ring," said Mrs. Burdmore, dully.

"Yes," he said, "you left it out on your dressing-table, Louisa,—not a safe thing to leave about."

He picked it up and looked at it regretfully, and then made as if to place it on her finger. It was Chris Burdmore's only mistake, and the woman whom they all still thought of as Mrs. Burdmore shrank back with a pained gesture.

Glyn wheeled about, and took a step forward.

"Burdmore!" he cried fiercely, "this has lasted long enough! I advise you in your own interest to leave

Sunniland at once, to-night ! You've time if you hurry. If you stay, you may find yourself arrested on a graver charge than that of bigamy."

He was so angered, so shaken out of his usual calm, that his words, though uttered in a very low voice, came with incoherent haste and force.

The man he addressed looked at him fixedly, hesitated for a moment, and then, quickly turning round, vaulted over the wooden railing, and dropped out of sight. They heard the sound of his feet, padding like those of some large animal, down the path.

Mrs. Burdmore stared into the darkness at the place where he had disappeared.

"He was always very kind to me," she said, plaintively. "I'm sure—I *know* he loved me."

Still no one spoke, and again it was Mrs. Burdmore who broke the silence. "Why, he forgot to give me back my ruby ring," she said complainingly, "and it's very valuable."

"Don't worry, I'll see that you get your ring !"

The words rang out in Peter Whitby's strong, confident voice ; and before any of them could say a word to stop him, and much to John Morgan's discomfiture, he rushed out into the night. They heard him fling the gate open, hesitate for a moment, and then rose on the stillness the tap-tap of his footsteps on the moon-lit road leading to Lilywood.

CHAPTER XXXV

PETER WHITBY had hesitated a moment at the gate, because he was not sure which way Burdmore had gone. The other man, in his thin evening shoes, had had only a few moments' start, but no sound of hurrying feet fell on the listener's ear.

By running swiftly along the grass which edged the road Burdmore might have had time to reach the bend leading to Lilywood. It was therefore to Lilywood that Whitby set out in pursuit.

The young man was moved with a passion of anger which every moment intensified; and the knowledge of how he had been fooled stung him to madness. As he strode up the road he cursed himself for not having leapt on Burdmore when it would have been so easy to do so, but at the time the dramatic interest of the meeting between the man—whom he at last knew to be a would-be murderer—and his victim had been to him so intense as to banish every thought of self.

What now possessed Whitby was not only a purely primitive instinct, a desire to be even with his enemy, but also an intense, instinctive jealousy. He told himself that his quarrel was with Burdmore, and with Burdmore alone. He tried to banish Cynthia from his thoughts.

Lilywood lay before him. Another moment and he would be there. He stopped short and looked at the house. It was closely shuttered, and not till he was in

front of the gate did he see with surprise that it was wide open, though the front door was shut.

The open gate affected Whitby curiously. It was the first time—the very first time—he had ever come and found it open.

As he stood before it he forgot for a moment his own quarrel with Burdmore, the way that plausible rogue—and worse than rogue—had fooled him! In place of the desire for revenge which had so wholly possessed him, he felt a sensation of horror, of something like physical fear, creeping over him.

Why, after all, was he there? What could he say to Burdmore in front of Cynthia—Cynthia, whom he now knew to be Burdmore's wife? It was not as if he had overtaken the brute in the open.

Whitby was about to turn slowly on his heel when, with fascinated eyes, he saw the door of the house slowly move back. Through the broadening chink there came a narrow stream of light, and then he heard the words, spoken in clear, low tones, "Have you come back without her, Chris? Oh, dear, where can she be?"

So the treacherous hound had left her—left her to bear the awful possibility of the house being searched—alone?

Peter Whitby walked through the gate, forward into the light. He pushed the door back till it stood widely open. The large, curiously furnished room with which he was so familiar, and which had become in a sense, so dear and familiar a place to him, formed a frame to Cynthia Burdmore's white-clad figure.

On seeing who it was she gave a little cry—of fear, or of relief? Whitby often wondered later which it had been. Then a wary look—a look which somehow cut him to the heart—came over her small face.

"Mr. Whitby?" she exclaimed, "how you frightened me! Have you met Chris?" and then, with an attempt at her usual cordiality, she added, "Do you know, such a strange thing has happened! We were in the garden, and Louisa slipped out! But I don't suppose she's gone far. I'm expecting Chris back with her every minute."

Whitby turned and shut the door very quietly. The one wish which now possessed him was to get Cynthia away, out of what he believed to be the danger zone—at once—to-night.

"Is anything the matter?" She asked the momentous question very gently.

Whitby nodded. For the moment he could not speak. He was trying to compose a form of words in which to convey to her the knowledge that everything—everything was known.

There was something desperately sad, a questioning look of anguish, in the young man's face. Their positions might have been reversed. One who looked on would have said that it was Whitby who had reason to be ashamed, not the woman on whom his gaze rested.

Cynthia Burdmore stood before him wearing the white gown into which she always changed each evening, and he thought he had never seen her looking so young, so innocent. The old-fashioned lamps shed a kindly light on her slender, rounded figure. She clasped her hands together—

"Mr. Whitby——! Has anything happened to Chris?"

"I don't think Burdmore will be back to-night," he said at last. "I fancy—indeed I'm sure—that he went to Boxford and caught the ten-thirty train to town. I suppose you know where——" he paused, and then uttered very clearly the words, "your husband would

be likely to stay in London? I suppose there is no difficulty as to your joining him there? I'm afraid it will be better for you to do so—at once."

She nodded her head, and with an instinctive gesture put out her hand and rested it on the lid of a high wooden chest near which she stood.

Whitby took a step forward. He thought she was going to fall—fear, fear of a horrible, an abject quality, filled her face, but she feebly waved him aside, and with unreasoning anger he divined that her terror was not for herself.

"He's all right," he said hastily, "he's got safely away. I'm here as your friend, Mrs. Burdmore"—his lips forced out the name he knew to be hers—"and I want to get you away now, to-night—at any moment the others may come."

"The others?" She shrank back.

"Yes," he said, briefly, "Glyn—and Mr. Morgan."

"Ah! And I suppose Tink Turner, too?" She said the words as if to herself rather than to him.

There came a rain of short, sharp blows on the door. Whitby walked over, and placed himself in front of Cynthia Burdmore. He felt her to be for the moment his to protect and defend.

"Who's there?" he called out. "Don't knock like that!"

There came an answering shout in a confident, boyish voice.

"I've brought a letter for Miss Burdmore, Lilywood. That's here, isn't it?"

Whitby opened the door, and a small lad came forward. He looked dubiously at Cynthia.

"If you're Miss Burdmore," he said, shrilly, "will you please give me two shillings? The gentleman said

you would give me two shillings if I brought you this safe."

Out of his little pocket he extracted a cocked-up note. Cynthia unfolded it with hands that shook. She glanced over it, and then handed it to Whitby. It was written on a half-sheet of note-paper, and had no signature:—

"Have had to go up to town. Follow to-morrow morning as soon as possible, leaving luggage to be despatched by charwoman, addressed Waterloo Cloak-room. There's a train that might suit you at five."

Whitby made no comment, save that he asked, "I suppose you'd prefer to go away to-night if possible."

"Oh, yes," she said, "indeed yes."

"There's a slow train to Waterloo," he spoke with a certain effort, "at eleven forty-two. It goes from Sunniland Station. If you'll put on your things I'll take you to the station, and then to-morrow I'll see your luggage is sent on. We needn't take your charwoman into our counsels."

"You're very kind," she said nervously, "but perhaps I'd better do as Chris said—wait till to-morrow morning. There are things I *must* take with me."

Whitby turned and faced her.

"I'm afraid you mustn't do that," he said, "you must leave to-night. I have the best of reasons for hurrying you away. I will carry anything you wish to take with you."

Again she murmured, "You're very kind."

"There's not much time," said Whitby, suddenly, "it will take us at least a quarter of an hour to walk to Sunniland Station."

She left him, and went upstairs. He heard her moving about, first slowly and then more quickly.

What could she be doing? What fatal proofs destroying? What did she know, and what suspect, that others knew?

She ran down and said breathlessly, but with great decision, "Mr. Whitby, I can't come now. I'm very sorry, but I've mislaid something I value very much, without which I can't leave Lilywood."

As he remained silent, she went on, "It's a small box which belonged to my mother." For the first time she looked violently moved, agitated to tears. "I can't think," she wailed, "what's happened to it!"

"Look in Mrs. Burdmore's room," said Whitby, moodily. "I think you'll find it there, probably open."

At once she became again unnaturally quiet. She turned without a word of thanks, and a moment later he heard the stifled exclamation which accompanied her discovery.

It seemed a long time before she rejoined him, ready for the journey, in the Quakerishly simple grey gown and hood-like bonnet which to him had always given her a touch of charm and distinction, setting her apart from other women.

In her hand she held the box to which she evidently attached such importance. It was old, shabby, worn, and now curiously bound round and round with a long strip of pink satin ribbon, apparently torn from one of Louisa Burdmore's gay dressing-gowns. He took it from her; she resisted a moment, and then let it go.

"And now I suppose we must start," she said, heavily.

Very deliberately she extinguished one of the lamps, and she was moving towards the other when Whitby said something in a voice which to himself sounded

quite unlike his own, for he had lost command over its modulations.

"Wait one moment—I suppose you've left everything in order,—I mean as you'd like it to be found?"

His eyes were fixed on the aperture which led to the kitchen and scullery, the places where, as he knew only too well, all the food for "poor Louisa," the woman whom he still thought of as Mrs. Burdmore, had always been prepared.

"I—I—think so," she answered, uncertainly.

In the eyes she had now fixed on his face he saw a hundred questions, the breathless seeking for a clue. She was doubtless asking herself how much he knew—how much he and the others suspected?

"You've poured away any medicines that may be lying about?" he went on, with forced lightness.

There was a moment of tense silence. At last, "I did that before you came in," she replied in a dry, toneless voice.

"Ah, well, then we can start."

As he spoke she turned down the wick of the other lamp, and Whitby hailed the darkness with inexpressible relief. Alas! he knew now far more than he had wished to learn. If victim, she was also accomplice.

"Wait one moment."

He went out, leaving the door open behind him, and looked up and down the road. There was no one in sight. The world of Sunniland was asleep, or just going to bed,—every one, that is, except the members of the Morgan household. They no doubt were all still up, talking with one another in excited whispers, hearing and repeating the amazing tale; Louisa Burdmore pouring out her woes in the horror-stricken ears of motherly Mrs. Morgan. Unless he were much mistaken,

Glyn and John Morgan would keep the worst of those suspicions which had now become certainties to themselves.

"We'd better go by the short cut," he suggested, "its steeper, but quicker and quieter." He wished to avoid the high road which led past the Morgans' house.

They walked away in silence, shutting the gate of Lilywood behind them. When they were engaged on the narrow, rutted road now only used as a cart track, Whitby's companion stumbled. "Take my arm," he muttered, but she shook her head.

A few minutes later, her foot again turned, and this time she almost fell.

Whitby put out his free hand, and caught her with a firm grip. His fingers closed on the soft flesh of her arm. How small she was! how fragile! And, in spite of all he now knew, how intimately bound to her he still felt himself to be.

He groaned, and let her arm go. She turned and gave him a curious, a plaintive look which said, or so he thought, "Yes, you know me now for what I am, and you fear to touch me."

"Take my arm!" he said roughly.

She laid her fingers on his coat sleeve, a fluttering touch; with a nervous movement he let slip the box he held under his other arm; the satin knot became loosened, and the lid fell open, half the contents of the box falling on to the moonlit road.

Cynthia gave a cry, and together they stooped down, and began quickly gathering up the various little things which signify life, love, and memory to many a better woman than was unhappy Cynthia Burdmore. There were three or four small packets of letters, and a number of faded photographs; while an old-fashioned

flat work-basket, which angry hands had disturbed and disarranged the night before, yawned open, revealing a baby's lace bonnet, a tiny gown, an old-fashioned coral.

She looked up rather defiantly. "It's foolish, isn't it, to keep such things?"

He said nothing. What could he say? His heart was wrung with jealous pain, as he thought how little he had known or guessed of even the innocent part of her past life.

"Have you a key?" he asked, briefly.

"Yes, but the lock must be broken, for I found the box open."

He tilted the box up. "I don't think the lock's broken. Have you got the key with you?"

She produced it from her bosom; it was fastened to a thin gold chain, and with it was her wedding-ring.

The key turned easily in the old-fashioned lock. She looked amazed, unreasonably surprised; he heard her murmur, "But, then, how did Louisa open it?"

Should he tell her? Nay, where would be the use? He would have been ready to barter any happiness he might look for, in the life which opened so fairly before him, to have had from her the assurance that she had known nothing of her husband's terrible design—but in his heart he knew that, even if she had given him such an assurance, he would not have believed her. She had not only known, she had even been the active instrument of Christopher Burdmore's wickedness. Nay more, Burdmore had so arranged matters that in case of suspicion, of discovery even, it was his wife, not himself, who would have borne the full brunt of the accusation.

They were close to the upland on which stood the quiet, deserted little country station. When they came within sight of the lights, he felt the sudden quickening of her steps.

"Mrs. Burdmore," he said hoarsely, "must you rejoin your husband? Do you really wish to go to him? Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" she said, surprised. "Afraid of Chris, Mr. Whitby?"

And then, as she caught sight of his face, convulsed with a great horror and loathing of the man whose personality seemed suddenly to surge up between them, she turned and spoke to him with a sombre energy, a passion he had never heard before in her voice:—

"Before I leave you—and we are never likely to meet again—I want you to understand, Mr. Whitby, how it stands with my husband, with Chris and myself. What he wishes done, I do. What he thinks right, I think right. I see life as he sees it. We've nothing in common with the sort of people to whom you belong, Mr. Whitby,—to the respectable, rich, well-established folk who are all you have ever known. We've no reason to obey the same laws—why should we? We belong to the pariahs, to the outcasts, of the world. I admit that there may have been a moment when Chris took a false step—but he was never allowed to retrieve it. Since then he has been at odds with the world—and where he leads, I follow."

"And what will you do now?" asked Whitby.

She looked at him with sudden suspicion, then hung her head, ashamed.

"I don't know," she said, uncertainly. "I expect Chris has already made some plan. I hope we shall

go away out of England. I'm English, but I hate England."

Whitby winced. He remembered the vague pain with which he had once heard Cynthia say something infinitely less strong, to the same effect—that is, that she preferred life as lived far from the country which he loved with the proud, wordless love Englishmen feel for England.

They were now on the platform; the train already signalled.

He left her for a moment, and got her a first-class ticket. There were three loose sovereigns in his pocket. As he put her into the railway carriage, he tried shamefacedly to slip them into her hand.

"No," she said, with sudden violence; "no, Mr. Whitby, don't think more ill of me than I deserve. I may be,—nay, I am,—a wicked woman according to your standards, but I won't take your money."

The money dropped out of his hand, but he did not stoop to pick it up. He stepped back and took off his hat; waited till the last low rumblings of the train had wholly died away, then left the station, and walked about till dawn.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ON the morning of the 29th of July, Mr. Richard Munstead started to walk from his rooms in Buckingham Street, Adelphi, to his office in London Wall. He chose by preference devious routes and little frequented thoroughfares, noting with the same gloomy disapproval, as he did every morning in the course of his long morning walk, the changes which were taking place in that part of the world which was to him the legal centre of London. Any kind of change was to Dick Munstead a change for the worse, and he deprecated improvements. In fact, in each great clearing of an insanitary area he saw written across the space the ugly word, "job."

He hoped Lincoln's Inn Fields would last his time, and as he walked across the garden there, which in theory he regretted was now open to the public, the sight of two laughing girls dressed in blue muslin suddenly made him bethink himself that, were he less of a philosopher, he also would now be hurrying towards 'bus or train on pleasure bent, for to-day was the elder Miss Morgan's wedding day.

There drifted across the surface of Richard Munstead's peculiar, embittered mind a fleeting regret that he had refused, and in so formal and scarcely gracious a fashion, Mrs. Morgan's invitation. It had been a kind, warm-hearted note; he had kept it by him, and sometimes he took it out and read it over, telling

himself that women were queer, sentimental creatures.

Then he remembered that John Morgan, on the occasion when they had met so short a time before, had not said a word of Mary's coming marriage, though the very day of the wedding must have even then been fixed! Mr. Munstead's face hardened in the sunshine; he was no fool, and he obscurely realized what had prompted John Morgan's reticence. No, no! It was well that he had refused Mrs. Morgan's invitation. It would only have led to unpleasantness, to a half-hearted renewal of a tie rudely sundered, and that by himself, long ago. He might have made an effort in the case of the elder daughter, but there was, it seemed, a younger girl; she would of course be also married in due time, and then it would all begin over again.

At last Mr. Munstead reached his office; the Courts had risen, and there was very little doing. He said a word to his clerk, took off his shabby outdoor coat and put on his office coat, read over the notes of a long message which had just been sent him by telephone—for Dick Munstead, unlike John Morgan, could not afford to disregard an invention which, however odious and uncalled for from his point of view, was now in universal commercial use—and then passed into his own inner room.

There, on the plain, knee-hole writing-table lay a telegram. It had been opened by his clerk, but the man had said nothing about it. Mr. Munstead took up the form and walked over to the window. As he did so, he told himself that the young women to whom the State now entrusts the serious task of taking down and transmitting telegraphic messages do their work very

badly. Still, he was able to make out, all too clearly for his own comfort, the message written there.

“Please come at once. I am in terrible trouble.

“LOUISA PEDDLE.”

But that was only part of the telegram, for the sender had added her address. The address, written in an untidy pencilled handwriting, was “The Haven, Sunniland, Surrey.”

The old solicitor folded the telegram in four; he walked back to his table and then unlocked one of the lower drawers of his knee-table. Dust lay over the neatly arranged little pile of envelopes lying there, and each was addressed, in now faded ink, to Richard Munstead, Esq. There was one large clean envelope addressed in the same handwriting on which the ink had not had time to fade, and it was from this that he now took two enclosures, the card of invitation to Mary Morgan’s marriage, and Mrs. Morgan’s note.

He opened Mrs. Morgan’s impulsive little note, but he did not glance, as he had glanced so often during the last three weeks, at the body of the letter. His eyes were fixed on the neat, plain address embossed at the top. Yes, there it was,—“The Haven, Sunniland, Surrey.”

What could Louisa Peddle have to do with his one-time friends? He had certainly spoken of her by name to John Morgan, for he remembered quite clearly his annoyance with himself for having done so, and the name, as certainly, had conveyed nothing to the owner of The Haven.

Then he bethought himself, with a certain relief, of an obvious explanation. The Haven was, of course, a hamlet, situated close to Sunniland; and by one of

those coincidences which happen so often in life his tiresome, old—no, he would not call her his friend—ex-client, Louisa Peddle, had somehow drifted there. She was not Louisa Peddle any more now, she was Louisa Burdmore; but women when agitated—and Mr. Munstead generally saw them agitated and behaving in a foolish manner—often sign their maiden names by mistake. She might even have signed Peddle with the silly notion that it would make him more willing to come and help her. He and Burdmore, as poor foolish Louisa well knew, had quarrelled seriously, and had even gone so far as to threaten each other with legal proceedings.

Richard Munstead glanced over Mrs. Morgan's invitation. One of the things that had determined his refusal—namely, that there would be a special train for the guests starting from Victoria at 12.30—now interested and attracted him. If he determined to obey Mrs. Burdmore's summons, then he might as well see something of Mary Morgan's wedding.

Yes, he would do that. The fact that Louisa Peddle had met with trouble he had foreseen and predicted to her put Mr. Munstead in a good humour, and yet he would have been much taken aback had any one accused him of spite or cruelty.

For the first time for many months he took a hansom cab. After calling at his bank, he directed the man to drive to a shop in Lincoln's Inn Fields where he had once, some twenty-three years ago, purchased an old silver rattle which had proved in every way satisfactory. But here, as everywhere else, things had changed for the worse; the old silver, the snuff-boxes, and other quaint trifles by which collectors set store, were not so good in quality, so rare in design, as they had once

been. Still Mr. Munstead knew enough to be aware that the various objects he saw in the window were, of their sort, exceptionally good.

Once in the shop, he explained, in as few words as possible, the type of article he desired to purchase, and the intelligence with which his wishes were realized increased his holiday humour. Mary Morgan had no more beautiful and choice wedding gift than the little shagreen housewife, of which each fitting of chased gold bore a tiny monogram which proved that the charming trifle had once belonged to Napoleon's Josephine.

With his new purchase safe in his pocket, Mr. Munstead then drove to a noted West-end tailor, a man who had reason to be grateful to him for his help in a certain delicate matter which had not increased the old solicitor's poor opinion of the female sex.

There, as he had fully anticipated, but as no one else in his place would have thought at all probable, he found the wedding garment he wanted. The fact that it fitted but indifferently, and that it was actually ready for despatch to a Continental customer of the firm's disturbed him not at all.

A few minutes later he was at Victoria Station, seeking information as to the special train which was to convey Mr. Morgan's guests to Sunniland, or rather to Boxford, where it seemed they would find carriages to take them first to the church, and then to The Haven.

When he at last found himself sitting in the saloon carriage Mr. Munstead felt like Rip van Winkle. He fortunately did not hear one of the younger guests observe to the girl who sat next to him, "That old man over there looks more like a mute than a wedding guest."

In how strange, how amazing a fashion had been spent at The Haven the night which preceded Mary Morgan's wedding day!

It was already late when poor Louisa had come and flung herself on the mercy of Rosedene,—later still when they had taken her up the hill and given her over to the care of kind Mrs. Morgan. But, even so, a long time went by before any of them thought of going to bed.

First one and then the other listened to the long outpourings of the woman whom they all, even now, thought of as Mrs. Burdmore; and each had taken his or her turn to be with her—real acts of self-abnegation, for Mrs. Morgan was longing to be with her husband, George with Mary, and Jenny with any one who would unravel the drama of which she held more clues than did almost any of those about her.

It was Jenny's father who first discovered this, and who then put to her a series of searching interrogations.

Bigamy? Murder? To Mrs. Morgan the two crimes were almost on a par; and she heard the terrible suspicion, which to the solicitor's mind had now become a certainty, without as much horror and surprise as her husband would have expected her to show.

They both agreed that Louisa need not be told of the fate to which the man she had in her own fashion truly loved had condemned her, but it was impossible to keep the knowledge from Jenny—and Jenny was terribly affected by the revelation.

The girl had known vaguely that such things were, but she believed, as most people are apt to believe, that they only happen *to other people*—to people whom one doesn't know, to strange, sinister folk who form a race

apart. There still echoed in her ears the loud, jovial laugh of Christopher Burdmore; true, she had had the best of reason for knowing him to be double-faced, but between that and murder there stretched an unabridged chasm—or so she had always thought till now.

As for Cynthia—Cynthia, Jenny noticed, was scarcely mentioned, not even by her father; tacitly Cynthia was left out of every discussion. Jenny asked herself with aching heart, what had become of Cynthia, of Cynthia and Peter Whitby? They had all heard him running up the road towards Lilywood. Whom had he found? What had he done? Where was he now? Would he be there the next day, ready to play his rôle of best man at Mary's wedding?

But Peter Whitby, as well as Cynthia Burdmore, was seldom mentioned during the long ejaculatory conversations at which Jenny was present, and in which she took part that night; conversations studded constantly with the words, "Do you remember?"—"It was on that day"—and so on and so forth.

Now and again the young man's name would crop up; Mr. Morgan more than once alluded to the fact that Whitby had been quite unsuspecting—that Whitby had not agreed with George. And though Jenny detected the note of contempt in her father's quiet, measured tones, she herself liked Peter Whitby all the better for his advocacy of those who had been his friends.

To Jenny, as to her father and her mother, the thought of the morrow was full of oppression.

Poor Mrs. Morgan! She would have given a great deal now to have consented to what George had so much desired—a quiet, almost a private wedding. But at the time she had told herself that all men felt like

that, and, after all, in this special case, the bridegroom owed something to the neighbourhood. Many of George Glyn's patients would have felt exceedingly annoyed had they been baulked of the amusement and pleasure of an old-fashioned country wedding. As it was, the whole countryside would be present in Boxford Church, and afterwards at the garden party which Mrs. Morgan was giving in honour of her daughter's marriage.

She was too excited, her mind was too full of the story which had just been told her, to notice that the two people most concerned looked happier and more composed than either had done for weeks.

To George Glyn the whole world had altered,—an awful weight had been lifted off his heart ; while as for Mary, she alone knew how sorely she had fretted over what she had considered her lover's strange and painful lack of confidence in her discretion. Now she knew everything ; or rather she listened spellbound, feeling as if she could never hear enough, while he told her every incident which he had felt bound to conceal from her during the last few weeks.

At last, when the rooms through which they had each and all been wandering so restlessly—for at such moments people cannot keep still—became filled with the first grey light of dawn, they went to bed, Mrs. Morgan, for the first time for many years, in another room than her own. It was impossible to leave "poor Louisa." What would happen to her were she to learn by some accident the further danger she had run ? The mother did not wish to delegate the task of sharing what might prove to be a painful vigil to either of her daughters.

It was ten o'clock when Mrs. Morgan woke up. The

woman she had been tending was still sleeping heavily, but the blinds were being drawn up, and that noisily, by Mr. Morgan. At any other time Mrs. Morgan would have been shocked to have seen her husband in a strange lady's bedroom, but now nothing surprised her—nothing, so she had time to tell herself while watching her husband pulling up the blinds, could now ever shock her any more!

But her surprises were not yet over, for just inside the door, blinking and frowning as the bright light poured into the large room, stood George Glyn. He, in defiance of all convention, had evidently also stayed at The Haven that night—the night before his wedding day.

“May I come in?” he whispered rather shamefacedly, “Mr. Morgan and I have thought it best to come and see how Mrs. Burdmore is this morning before allowing any of the servants to come into the room.”

And then the three rapidly consulted, and decided what would be best to do.

Now had come the time when, as the solicitor reminded his wife, least said would be soonest mended. All that had just happened was no one's business but their own—theirs and that of the unhappy woman who lay sleeping through their whispered debate.

If any neighbours asked a question of Mrs. Morgan or of Jenny,—it was not likely that the bride would be troubled by even the most indiscreet on such a day,—then they must be referred to Mr. Morgan, and he would make short work of them. It would of course be stated that a friend had fallen ill in the house, but no one need be told that the friend was Louisa Burdmore. There would be plenty of time to discuss what should be done with her after the marriage was

over. Glyn doubted whether she could be moved for a fortnight.

The discussion did not take more than ten minutes, and yet one more matter was settled. This was that, as far as was possible, no one should be allowed in the sick room except Mrs. Morgan herself. · Louisa's unrestrained lamentations,—her confidences, pathetic or grotesque according to the feelings of those listening to them,—were not of a nature which Mrs. Morgan would have wished any of the younger women in the house to remember. As for Jenny, the quicker she forgot the whole story the better it would be.

Once dressed, and having been in a measure comforted by the warm, clinging kisses of her daughters, she went quickly into the room where was laid out the handsome mauve silk gown she had had made to wear at the wedding.

She looked down at the dress with a feeling akin to disgust. No, she could not wear this showy frock to-day, when going in and out of the room of a woman who lay ill, miserable, and humiliated?

So it was that, after a moment's hesitation, the mistress of The Haven put on one of the quietest of her last year's summer gowns, looking—though she had not the consolation of knowing it—all the better and younger in it. She also decided that she must stay at home while they were all at the church. How could she leave Louisa for even an hour? And John Morgan quite agreed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RICHARD MUNSTEAD walked from Boxford Station to the church, and he intended to walk from Boxford Church to The Haven, which, as we know, he took to be a neighbouring village.

He did not wish to be beholden to John Morgan for even the use of a hired carriage. He had made his plans carefully; he meant to be present at Mary's wedding, without if possible being seen by either of his old friends; then he intended to seek out Louisa Burdmore, and having seen her, make his way back to town.

By the time Mr. Munstead arrived at Boxford Church the marriage service had begun; but, look as he would, and he had very sharp eyes, Mr. Munstead could see no woman who in the slightest degree recalled the Jane Morgan of his youth.

He made out the relationships of most of the group now standing before the altar, though this was not quite easy, as he could only see their backs. There was John Morgan, tall, frock-coated, still straight and lithe of figure; the bridegroom, a poor, shabby-looking little fellow, for so Mr. Munstead unkindly described Glyn to himself, and that although the doctor was of the average height, only looking short in comparison with his father-in-law and his best man. As to the one bridesmaid, a slender girl, standing just behind the bride, she was, he supposed, Mary's only sister.

Then Mr. Munstead overheard some chattering lady whisper, "No, Mrs. Morgan couldn't come to the church; they have a friend staying with them who has fallen ill—so annoying, isn't it? But she will, of course, receive everybody afterwards; they have asked a lot of London people down."

Richard Munstead shrank back, well out of sight, as the wedding party came down the aisle; but he managed to get a good view of them all the same. The bride was very pale, her lips quivering, but she looked charming and happy, and Mr. Munstead thought he would have known her again for the little Polly he remembered, the more so that she was now like her mother,—though not, so he told himself quickly, as good-looking as he remembered Mrs. Morgan to have been.

A really handsome couple were the two walking behind the bride and bridegroom,—the bride's sister and George Glyn's best man. But neither of them was smiling,—in fact they both looked utterly miserable. Excitement had made Jenny Morgan as red as her sister was pale; she was looking straight before her, as if her thoughts were wandering far, far from Boxford Church and Mary's marriage—as indeed they were.

As for the tall young man walking by her side, Mr. Munstead actually caught himself weaving about this curly-headed youth a rather pathetic little romance. It was clear that, if best man, he was also rival of George Glyn; only unrequited love for the bride could make the best man look like that on his friend's wedding day!

The only member of the wedding group who seemed thoroughly pleased with himself, and with everybody about him, was John Morgan; but then, so Dick Munstead now reminded himself resentfully, John Morgan had always possessed one of those commonplace, equable

temperaments which go so far to secure not only the happiness, but the good fortune, of their possessors.

Richard Munstead, born and bred a Londoner, had always felt a certain contempt for country yokels, and this feeling was justified to-day by the difficulty he experienced in finding The Haven. Every one he met persisted in telling him that The Haven was the name of the Morgans' house, and not that of a hamlet or village near Sunniland.

At last one shabby-looking lad, to whom he gave sixpence for his trouble, did actually take him to a house called Lilywood, where, he asserted, some people named Burdmore lived; but the house was closely locked and shuttered, obviously uninhabited, and so at last, most unwillingly, Mr. Munstead breasted the little hill and turned through the open gates of what, against his better sense, he was compelled to believe was after all The Haven.

With laggard steps, wishing himself a thousand miles away, he followed the servant through the house, noting as he went its air of bright prosperity.

Mrs. Morgan was standing on the lawn receiving her guests; but almost every one had arrived by now, and she was alone. So it was that at last Dick Munstead saw his hostess—saw her long before she saw him.

Richard Munstead turned to the servant. "Don't announce me," he said gruffly, "I'll go out presently."

She had changed—she had certainly changed very much in the twenty odd years since he had seen her. But still, he felt he should have known her anywhere; for time had been kind to Mrs. Morgan—kinder than to most of the middle-aged women who now surrounded her.

Dick Munstead liked her dress; it was what he had

always found the wearer,—simple and unpretentious. No doubt it had cost a great deal of money, and no doubt it was new—she would naturally have got a new dress for her daughter's wedding; but to his fastidious eyes,—and there is no one so fastidious concerning these matters as an old bachelor,—the silvery gown looked in far better taste than those worn by the other matrons present. He liked the shady hat, which almost entirely concealed the now grey hair and shadowed the blue eyes which had looked at him with such pity and concern the last time he had seen her, twenty-three years ago. . . .

Well, well, he must now go forward and say, or try to say, the silly things he supposed wedding guests were called upon to utter on these occasions. Slowly he walked forward through the glazed door leading into the garden, and stood—to Mrs. Morgan a helpless-looking, very strange figure of a man—in the sunlight.

Though Mr. Munstead would have been very much surprised and piqued if he had known it, he had changed far more than had his hostess, and it was because of certain physical peculiarities which still clung to his gait, and to the odd appearance he presented generally, rather than anything in her recollection of what he had been like, which made Mrs. Morgan suddenly realize who it was who was now advancing towards her across the lawn.

But, though she had not expected to see him, Dick Munstead's presence did not particularly surprise Mrs. Morgan, and she did not feel as moved and interested as she would have done in ordinary circumstances. Her heart and mind were too full of other things; and then his sudden appearance, after the curt refusal which at the time had given her pain, was in a sense all of a piece

with the other amazing happenings of the last twelve hours.

"Well," he said, "I've come, you see—after all!"

That was all he could find to say, and Mrs. Morgan, with the good sense which to him had always set her apart from the rest of her sex, replied a trifle tremulously, "I hoped you would do so, Mr. Munstead, and I'm very glad to see you."

As she turned and began walking with him—he was the first of her guests with whom she had done that—she made but one oblique reference to the past.

"I must reintroduce you to Mary,"—she spoke with some eagerness—"she is still so fond of the beautiful rattle you gave her, Mr. Munstead; and it is one of the things she will take away with her to her new home."

And then, wording what he had to say awkwardly, and making it very clear that it was to the mysterious telegram he had received that Mrs. Morgan really owed his presence at her daughter's marriage, Mr. Munstead asked if it were indeed the case that there was now at The Haven a certain Louisa Burdmore, who for some obscure feminine reason had chosen, when sending for him, to sign her maiden name of Peddle.

"Yes! no! I think I had better call my husband, Mr. Munstead, he will explain everything to you"; and, to her old friend's discomfiture, Mrs. Morgan hurried off, leaving him standing alone.

Odd that even the most sensible woman can never give a plain answer to a plain question! Either Mrs. Burdmore was at The Haven or she was not. There was surely no need to bring John Morgan into the matter?

But even Richard Munstead changed his mind when he heard the story, told him in short, guarded sentences, of what had befallen his unhappy client.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "I thought of many things that might happen to her, but never this—never this! I refer, of course, to his being a married man. As to his wanting to do away with her—*that* I always expected, of course!"

"Oh, Mr. Munstead, how terrible! Did you really expect that?" Mrs. Morgan looked at him with fascinated horror.

"Not poison—no, no! I thought he'd choose some more natural method—the method ordinary husbands use. That is, I never thought that, married to Burdmore, she would make old bones, but now I suppose she will."

"Yes," Mr. Morgan replied, "she'll go on worrying you to the end of the chapter, Munstead!"

"Oh, come, there's hope for me yet; she may marry again!" Dick Munstead was in holiday mood to-day. But Mrs. Morgan looked at him with displeasure. There had always been something hard and cynical about Dick Munstead—so unlike her John!

"You would not talk of her so if you could see her," she said reproachfully.

"See her! But that's what I've come here for—to see her—to see her and to see you," he ended, lamely. Then, in quick amendment, "But I'll be off as soon as I've had a talk to the poor soul. Not that there's anything to talk about, eh, Morgan? She won't want to *do* anything, I hope?—"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Morgan quickly; "she—she talks so oddly about it all. She would like, so she says, to see his *wife* in prison, but of course that's impossible."

"You'll find she has plenty to talk about," observed Mr. Morgan drily; "and Munstead—you mustn't think of rushing off back to town; you've got to make Jenny's acquaintance——"

"And I shall be very much offended if you don't stay on to supper, Mr. Munstead," Mrs. Morgan chimed in, and then she blushed—for she could still blush; it was from her both girls inherited the colouring which counted so much in their differing types of beauty.

And so Richard Munstead, greatly forswearing himself, stayed on—stayed on long after the bride and bridegroom had gone; outstayed the last guest, and by his queer quips and jokes enlivened to a certain extent the informal meal at which the only other stranger present was silent Peter Whitby.

The old solicitor noticed that they all treated the young man—now George Glyn's *locum tenens*—with a peculiar kindness, and Dick Munstead, still clinging to the theory he had formed in Boxford Church, told himself that it must be very unpleasant to be treated like that by the relatives of the woman you have loved foolishly and vainly. He felt inclined to shake this young man! Why there was Jenny, every bit as pretty as her sister Mary! Twice he, Mr. Munstead, had caught Jenny looking, with a sad, searching expression on her bright face, at Peter Whitby.

And then at last there came an end to the long, tiring day.

"You mustn't go away without saying good-bye to Jenny!" John Morgan was going to walk to the station with his old friend.

"I'll find her," said Mr. Munstead hurriedly, and he went out alone into the moonlit garden.

Far away he thought he saw the flutter of a woman's skirt. He trod quickly across the close turf; it was years, nay, it was a life-time, since he had last walked at night across a moonlit lawn—the little lawn of the suburban house where the Morgans were then living.

But when he reached the place where he had thought to see a white, shadowy form, it was deserted.

But stay, there came from the further end of the path a slight, scarcely audible sound, betokening, or so it seemed to him, some secret anguish, some intolerable pain. He stepped again on to the grass and crept along towards the place whence came that strange sound. What he was doing was not at all nice; but a strange curiosity consumed him, and soon it was satisfied.

Sitting in an arbour lighted by a Chinese lantern were Peter Whitby and Jenny Morgan. They were both sitting down, the man with his arms flung across a round table, his head bowed down, and the girl looking at him—looking as she had looked at supper, her face full of pain and perplexed questioning.

Suddenly Whitby lifted his haggard face.

"I can't bear it," he said, and there was a passion of revolt and anger in his low voice. "I don't know how to bear it. I—I loved her so, Jenny!"

Jenny made no articulate answer, but she put out her kind hand—the eavesdropper noticed that it was a soft, round little hand, like her mother's—and touched the arm lying near to her.

"I suppose you think I was a great fool—I *was* a fool," he went on thickly, "and more than a fool!"

She withdrew her hand from his arm——

"Don't!" he said, "I like it there!" And then he straightened himself a little, and took her hand. He held it for a moment. "Jenny," he said, "you've been awfully good to me to-day. You're the only person who has understood. You'll always be my friend, won't you?"

"Of course I will," she said, briefly.

"Ah! But really?"

"Yes—really," she said.

"Did you find her?" asked Mrs. Morgan, a few moments later.

"Yes, oh yes, I found her," Mr. Munstead spoke hurriedly; he was afraid of missing his train.

"And you'll come again—soon?"

As a matter of fact, Richard Munstead did not leave London again for a very long time,—not till he came once more to Boxford Church to be present at another wedding, and to Sunniland to be introduced to what he considered the very ugliest, if healthiest, baby he had ever seen.

"A pity," he could not help observing privately to Mrs. Morgan, "a pity that Mrs. Glyn has not produced as beautiful a child as she was herself. But then, she was exceptionally pretty!"

"But Mary was a girl," Mrs. Morgan objected quickly, "and her baby is a boy. Also, I don't think you saw her when she was as young as three months old, Mr. Munstead."

"Oh yes, I did," he said obstinately. "I saw her when she was even younger than that. Her skin never had that peculiar, mottled look. However, no matter,—we will hope that Mrs. Peter Whitby will be more fortunate——"

Mrs. Morgan looked at him doubtfully. She had always feared he was a little eccentric—coarse would be too strong a word—in his conversation. In fact, John had rather given her to understand that. So she quickly changed the conversation. "And how is poor Miss Peddle, Mr. Munstead?"

"Same as usual! Same as usual! She's living at a hydro just now—and I was afraid a little time back that she was going to be married—one can hardly call it *again*, eh?"

Mrs. Morgan shrank back. "No, no," she said quickly,—her old friend *was* a little coarse, after all.

"A clergyman this time—a widower with eight children. The children frightened her off. But you know she's quite a heroine—tells people—everybody—of her romantic affair. That's how she looks at it now, you know!"

"And—and the Burdmores, Mr. Munstead?" Mrs. Morgan's voice dropped to the lowest whisper.

He made a not uneloquent gesture expressive of utter negation.

"Gone!" he said. "Vanished into the night—'The wicked flee when no man pursueth.' The Bible's right there, Mrs. Morgan." Again he repeated the impressive words—"The wicked flee when no man pursueth."

THE END

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

STUDIES IN WIVES.

"In all Mrs. Lowndes's work may be observed a quiet, watchful wisdom, and endeavour to see things accurately, to collect cases, and then to omit or to suppress any generalities founded upon them. She proves that (if only one knows the way) as good a short story can be written in English as in French. Each of these six cases enlarges the reader's acquaintance with one or two, as it were, actual people, in whom he takes a keen interest."—*Times*.

"The whole book is well worth studying as a capital example of a psychological analysis carried out by a woman or women. All the different wives have a reality of their own, and testify to the author's intuitive discernment and artistic skill."—Mr. W. L. COURTNEY in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"They are exactly of the right length, contain no flat passages, and deal with situations which are striking and original."—*Athenæum*.

"Of the six stories which go to form this book, not one is without distinction. All are characterized by breadth of sympathy and insight. The authoress does not moralize, she presents a case. Her stories, while of a clear-cut finality of form, still provoke, rather than satisfy, the imagination. In a word, they make us think. The book cannot fail to charm those who appreciate good writing and strong and subtle characterization."—*Bookman*.

"The best book Mrs. Lowndes has written. Of all the many books published of late on the marriage question this seems to be the ablest, the most thoughtful, the most penetrating. It makes altogether for righteousness, and it shows such subtlety, such quiet power, such capacity for expression, as very few of our younger novelists may claim."—*British Weekly*.

"Her studies are light without being shallow; and that, if you come to think of it, is not a common thing. The wives in this engrossing book are living women. There is nothing automatic about Mrs. Belloc Lowndes's characters, and the dignity of human weakness is an open page to her. It is a long time since we read a collection of short stories that contained so much observation, so much dramatic art, and such a vivid sense of the irony of circumstance."—*Sketch*.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 21, BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

THE PULSE OF LIFE.

“Unlike most novelists of her sex, she is equally good at men and at women. Her least important characters have individuality; we have met few heroines so adorable as the wide-eyed, whole-souled Sabine. The scenes are as vivid as the people.”—*Times*.

“Mrs. Lowndes is, above all, a psychologist, and here the marks of distinction, of refinement, of clever analysis are obvious. There are a series of characters drawn in these pages, and the majority of them are full of vitality and truth. These are the figures which will make us remember ‘The Pulse of Life,’ the contrast of character, the piquant varieties of temperament which Mrs. Lowndes delineates for us with so assured a touch. For all those to whom it is a keen pleasure to discover careful and conscientious workmanship, throughout guided and controlled by an artistic conscience, ‘The Pulse of Life’ may be heartily recommended.”—*Daily Telegraph*.

“The charm of the novel—and it has real charm—is in the perfect excellence of Mrs. Lowndes’s art as a writer. She has versatility in a rare degree, and mingles grave with gay so that there is no tediousness in the unfolding of her tale. She has power of insight also, and the analysis of feeling practised on such subjects as Anne Leyster and Joaquina gives ample scope to her skill.”—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

“A memorable addition to contemporary fiction.”—*Morning Post*.

“Has an imaginative charm, a restraint of style, and beauty of conception that mark an extraordinary advance in its author’s powers. It is a book that is full of the evidence of work and thought without any heavy or patchworked result. For a delicate, complete, poignant, and refined novel of an unusual kind, ‘The Pulse of Life’ may be very confidently recommended.”—*Evening Standard*.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 21, BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

THE HEART OF PENELOPE.

"Much above the average of modern fiction, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes has here made an attempt at serious literature . . . her novel is both clever, original, and readable."—*Spectator*.

"An exceptionally good story, told with considerable skill, and marked by a sensitive understanding of the mysteries of the feminine disposition."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"One of the cleverest novels of the year is Mrs. Belloc Lowndes's romance of the Diplomatic Service. It is brilliantly written, and quite absorbing in its interest."—*British Weekly*.

"Nothing is more remarkable in 'The Heart of Penelope' than the sense it gives of continuity . . . The completeness of each study of character—and they are all notably complete—is largely due to the fact that each person is consistently regarded in the light of his or her parentage, or upbringing, or previous experience . . . The book deserves careful reading; it is a strong and dignified piece of work, with, as the phrase goes, 'a great deal in it.' Mrs. Lowndes writes with now and then an apt flash of wit, and a constant and gratifying security of style and phrases."—*Times*.

"A novel of quite exceptional power and interest."—*Bookman*.

BARBARA REBELL.

"The story of a great passion told with delicacy and power."—*Times*.

"A fine novel. Every figure is carefully studied in relation to ancestry, upbringing, and environment, and stands out as a fully realized and convincing portrait. Careful workmanship and psychological insight put it on a high plane of merit."—*Spectator*.

"Told with consummate skill and insight into character."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"An absolutely fascinating novel."—*Truth*.

"'Barbara Rebell' should please those who ask of a novelist intellectual enjoyment, good writing, and that *quelque chose de spirituel* which is so difficult to define."—*Bookman*.

"A remarkable piece of work distinguished for its freshness and originality its admirable good taste, its delicate power of observation, and a greatly polished style . . . A brilliant piece of work."—*Daily Graphic*.

"This book is warmly packed with life and colour; it is peculiarly rich in minor characters; and it is a most absorbing study of men and women."—*Illustrated London News*.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 21, BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE UTTERMOST FARTHING.

In One Volume. Crown 8vo., price 2s. 6d.

Mr. W. L. COURTNEY writes in the *Daily Telegraph*: "The exciting and dramatic story which Mrs. Belloc Lowndes has to tell—a carefully wrought bit of narrative, in which we become wholly absorbed. It is a capitally managed plot, which reveals Mrs. Belloc Lowndes as one of the best of our story-tellers, full of a quick and vivid imagination."

"Mrs. Lowndes has done nothing better than this little book. . . . The skill of the book lies in the atmosphere it creates. . . . Mrs. Lowndes is alive to the last point. . . . 'The Uttermost Farthing' is a powerful study of emotions, but it has also a certain delicacy and finish which we find more often in French than in English writers."—*Westminster Gazette*.

"The passionate conventionality underlying this novel is justified by careful art and strong human interest."—*Athenæum*.

"A really thrilling story, the sort of book which is so close-knit with interest and so tense with actuality that when once you have begun it you cannot leave it off until the mystery is cleared up."—"H. H. F." in the *Evening News*.

"It has all the acuteness of observation and dignity of style that always characterize Mrs. Belloc Lowndes's writing. Every one of her characters lives."—Mr. SIDNEY DARK in the *Daily Express*.

"You read 'The Uttermost Farthing' from cover to cover without a moment to take breath. A strange and vivid incident shown, with its consequences, at a single stroke. Seldom can anyone have hit upon a more original or a more pathetic situation."—*Daily Mirror*.

"Sensational, dramatic . . . a novel well out of the ordinary rut . . . strong, artistic, absorbing."—*World*.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 21, BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

